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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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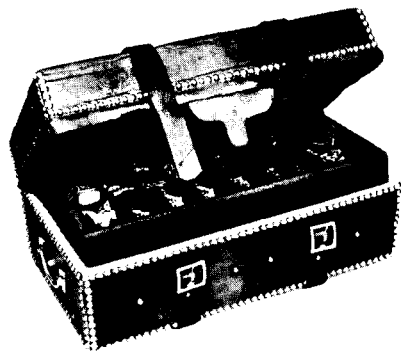

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The Despairing Optimist . . . . . .

RENÉ DUBOS

Tourists in Mexico City are urged to visit the Plaza of the Three Cultures, not only to enjoy a unique sight, but also because they can experience in it a visual synopsis of Mexican history. From any point in the plaza, one can encompass three very different kinds of buildings: the recently excavated remnants of a large Aztec ceremonial structure, an austere Catholic church built by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, immediately after the conquest, and a group of high-rise apartment houses erected by the revolutionary government for the workers who are creating modern Mexican civilization.

I have traveled through Mexico on several occasions during the past twenty years, but have no extensive knowledge of Mexican history. My only reason for taking a special interest in the Plaza of the Three Cultures is that it incarnates contrasting aspects of human behavior and simultaneously evokes feelings of despair and of hope—the same mixture of feelings that leads me to both despair and optimism whenever I think about the fate of Western civilization.

There is much reason for despair indeed when one stands in the Plaza of the Three Cultures because Mexican history is but one other example of the fact that human history is an endless chronicle of foolish behavior and acts of violence. The Aztec ceremonial structure calls to mind an Indian society that achieved power and wealth by military domination over its Mesoamerican neighbors, and that felt the need to placate its gods by human sacrifice. I cannot look at the structure without thinking of priests in colorful attire pulling warm and bloody hearts out of young human bodies opened with an obsidian knife. The sixteenth-century church on the plaza is testimony to the violent destruction by the Spaniards of the shrines and religious practices that were such important aspects of the Indian ways of life. I experience in imagination the suffering of the Indians as their deities were suddenly replaced by a foreign god and as they were compelled to serve as slave labor for the creation of new kinds of wealth in which they had no share. The high-rise apartment houses around the plaza can be seen as just one more aspect of the undisciplined growth of Mexico City with its 7.5 million inhabitants, its omnivorous automobile traffic, its buildings progressively sinking into the ground, its industrial fumes that pollute and muddy the once sparkling sky. I remember also the political restlessness that resulted in the 1968 massacre by the police—precisely on the Plaza of the Three Cultures.

But other thoughts of a more pleasant nature also come to me when I stand in the plaza. I recognize in the three very different architectural styles that it contains, and in the different social functions served by the buildings, an exciting display of man's power to create a great diversity of values from a given set of natural resources and environmental conditions. In 1519, when Cortés and his Conquistadores first reached Mexico City—or rather Tenochtitlán, as the Aztec capital was then called—they found a large urban settlement with imposing structures

RENÉ DUBOS is a microbiologist at the Rockefeller University and is the author of *A God Within* and *Beast or Angel? Choices That Make Us Human.*

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and gardens in the midst of a natural lake; they marveled at the wealth and splendor of Montezuma's court, and at the sophistication of Indian arts and sciences.

The Spaniards, however, were intent on converting the Indians to Christianity. They destroyed as much of the pagan civilization as they could, drained the lake, and built on the very site of Tenochtitlán a new city that became the jewel of the Americas. To this day, Mexican life owes much of its fervor, charm, and zest to the baroque architectural styles, the religious celebrations, the vibrant fiestas that can be traced to the Spanish Conquest.

The twentieth-century revolution has brought to light still other facets of Mexican creativity. Bold experimentation in politics, economics, architecture, and other art forms is reflected in the vigorous originality of the urban and rural environments, and also in the pride and air of expectancy displayed by all classes of people and all age groups.

The Three Cultures Plaza thus is a concrete demonstration of Octavio Paz's thesis in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* that while "history has the cruel reality of a nightmare, the grandeur of man consists in his making beautiful and lasting works" out of the substance of this nightmare.

It is now fashionable in all countries of Western civilization to doubt that mankind will be able to cope with the environmental stresses and emotional disturbances that will inevitably result from sudden changes in technology and in the ways of life. Alvin Toffler invented the felicitous phrase "future shock" as a symbol for "the shattering stress and disorientation induced in individuals subjected to too much change in too short a time." But granted that our collision with tomorrow will often be uncomfortable, I doubt that our future shock will be as painful and destructive as were the upheavals experienced by the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Incas, and other Indian populations at the time of the Spanish Conquest.

Within a very few years after the conquest, the entire structure of Indian life was destroyed; its cosmology crumbled, its daily occupations lost their meaning. The loss of their gods, their temples, their leaders, their traditional ways of worship and of life left the Indians in a state of social disarray and, more important, of complete emotional solitude. Many of them probably chose death because they saw no hope; those who survived accepted Catholicism as the only way to reestablish contact with life on earth and also with the divine world.

As practiced by the Indians, Catholicism was of course a mixture of their ancient beliefs and of the Christian concepts imposed on them by the Spaniards. This artificial composite religion could hardly give them complete emotional or spiritual satisfaction, but it enabled them to develop a new kind of personal and cultural existence that integrated them in a larger world system and yet made it possible for them to keep alive many of their traditional ways. The civilization of colonial Mexico was officially that of the Conquistadores, but it progressively incorporated so many Indian values that it became profoundly different from Spanish civilization. In the revolutionary era of the twentieth century, Indian influences have gained more prominence in Mexican civilization—to such an extent that, in the eyes of an outsider at least, Indians and mestizos now seem to have largely recovered from the future shock they experienced at the time of the Spanish Conquest.

The present obsession of our societies with future shock is an expression of our common belief—of our Panglossian attitude—that everything would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds if it were not for human intervention. But although we are now more interested in safety and comfort than in exploration and adventure, natural history and human history show that struggle is the essence of life and that the quality of life has always implied difficult choices and decisions. If life goes on despite so many ordeals, it is because natural systems and human beings are extremely resilient; they can experience future shock without being irreversibly shattered or disoriented. Time and time again, human beings have shown themselves capable of adapting to entirely new and difficult situations, and even of using stressful conditions to develop new and better formulas of life. In fact, social evolution de-

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pends on creative responses to environmental and social challenges.

Octavio Paz states in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* that civilizations can come into being and survive only through acts of creation by which they transform the "nightmares of history" and "the shapeless horror of reality" into new social and cultural systems; experience shows that these creative acts are generally based on visionary anticipations rather than on a pedestrian view of existence. The future is never an extrapolation from the past because societies evolve through choices that often appear unreasonable and even outright foolish when judged from the point of view of a "realistic" evaluation of circumstances.

Mexico was still a very poor nation a few decades ago. Shortages of food and bad sanitation generated much disease and were formidable obstacles on the road to economic development—as indeed they still are today in much of Mexico. One can therefore take it for granted that many heated discussions occurred at that time among the leaders of the successive revolutionary governments concerning national priorities. Since 1910, Mexico has been governed by the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, then by the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, and now by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. But whatever the political complexion, reasonable people probably believed that agricultural and industrial development should be the first priorities so as to provide the resources for better living conditions. And yet, one of the early decisions of the Revolutionary Government was to build in Mexico City a spectacular museum of anthropology displaying and explaining in a lavish manner the origins and histories of the people who now constitute the Mexican nation.

The Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City is one of the most exciting, inspiring, and enlightening creations of the contemporary world; but its most astonishing aspect is that it was created at a time when millions of Mexican people were short of food and other necessities of life. From the practical approach, one could defend the view that the funds and skills required for building the museum would have been used more profitably to create dairy herds or better housing for the destitute working classes. But more visionary thinkers won the day and the great museum which was inaugurated in 1965 now symbolizes, not economic growth, but instead the continued artistic creativeness of ancient and contemporary Mexico.

Although the creation of the museum appears an achievement of no practical utility, I believe that its influence will eventually prove to be a great contribution to the mental health and happiness of the Mexican people—greater than would have been achieved if the same amount of funds and skills had been devoted to the production of milk, meat, housing, or other practical improvements. Social accounting will remain a dreary science until it learns to give its proper value to the sense of pride in their country that Mexican children acquire in the museum by becoming aware of their long and rich cultural past—a sense that helps in bringing about the social integration essential to civic and economic progress.

Discussions of priorities are meaningful only to the extent that there is some agreement concerning the goals to be reached. For societies as well as for individual persons, the selection of goals is greatly affected by mental attitudes. Pessimists tend to be primarily concerned with the dreary problems that endlessly emerge from the necessities of day-to-day existence. Optimists, in contrast, tend to indulge in visions of what they would like the future to be. As a philosophy of action, creative optimism is very different from the Panglossian attitude that is blind to the problems that plague mankind. It implies instead that we have the ability to imagine the kind of world in which we would like to live and that we can impose a pattern of our own on existing reality to bring our dreams into being.

Traditional societies are not the most suitable environments for the cultivation of genuine optimism. By definition, they distrust change and especially sudden leaps into the unknown. They put their trust in the values that they consider practical and normal, because they are familiar with them; as a result they tend to visualize the future as an

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extrapolation from the present; but this very realism can be their undoing.

At all levels of social evolution, traditional societies have developed to the absurd the policies or techniques that assured their early successes—the Roman Empire collapsed under the weight of the people and lands it had conquered; the French monarchy collapsed under the weight of its centralized government of divine right; technological societies will collapse under the weight of their motorcars, skyscrapers, and effort-saving devices. Furthermore, the realism of traditional societies fosters a dreary kind of practical logic that stifles the human longing for emotional and intellectual adventure and that elicits as a compensatory reaction certain antisocial patterns of behavior largely based on a cult of the irrational. In the long run, boredom may be the Achilles' heel of traditional societies.

Admittedly, technological and social innovations appear at first sight to be antitraditionalist. But while they are constantly changing ways of life, the changes they bring about are usually superficial. Most innovations aim at improving this or that policy or procedure without changing significantly the fundamental assumptions on which modern civilizations are based. Paradoxically, it is the very belief in progress that makes Western societies increasingly traditional. Progress has come to mean traveling as fast as possible in the direction along which technological societies have been moving since the Industrial Revolution—even though the road they have taken may lead to social or ecological disaster.

An indication of the power of the traditional attitude in technological societies is the wave of pessimism that followed publication of the book *Limits to Growth* sponsored by the Club of Rome. On the basis of studies with computer models, and by extrapolating from present trends, the authors of *Limits to Growth* have concluded that overpopulation, pollution, and exhaustion of natural resources will soon mean catastrophe for Western civilization; as the authors point out themselves, however, these conclusions are valid only if present trends are allowed to continue.

The fact that our societies cannot continue forever doing more and more of the same is so obvious that it was known by any sensible person long before the age of computers. But this does not mean that growth must stop unless one assumes that the only kind of growth is quantitative growth, in other words doing more and more of the same. While individuals or societies cannot grow quantitatively forever, they can continue growing qualitatively by undergoing adaptive changes that enable them to take advantage of new conditions.

According to Gilbert K. Chesterton, or rather according to the definitions that he facetiously attributed to a little girl, a pessimist is a man who looks after your feet and an optimist is a man who looks after your eyes. There is truth in this fanciful definition. We need the plodding dreary thinker—the pessimist—who is concerned about our contacts with the earth and with existing realities from moment to moment. But we need even more the imaginative thinker—the optimist—who puts his trust in the power of vision and in the right choice of road. The pessimist is concerned only with the correction of misuses and abuses. The optimist in contrast emphasizes the right uses and also wants to discover completely new uses. All the great advances of history have come from the willingness to start on a new road under the guidance of a new vision, even at the cost of revolutionary changes in the ways of life. This is precisely why creative optimism is a peculiarly human attitude; only man can be revolutionary.

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Sex and the Professors

ARISTIDES

Make Love Not Knowledge was not one of the slogans of the past decade, a decade rich in sloganeering, but reading some of the literature of the period might well lead one to believe otherwise. The academic novel has been with us for a long while, but of late it has taken a new turn. Love affairs between professors, or between a professor and the wife of another faculty member, have not been uncommon to the academic novel—a genre that, given the general quietude of the campus as a setting for fiction, has always had to scratch about fairly vigorously to find the conflict or drama necessary to sustain a longish work of literature. (Why are battles for academic power, a riddle asks, waged at such a high pitch of intensity? Because, the answer is, the stakes are so low.) Now a new touch has been supplied: students have been added to the cast of characters in the academic novel. And they have been featured chiefly as lovers—more specifically, as lovers of their professors.

The place now held by the student in academic fiction was, in an earlier version of this kind of writing, held by the visiting writer. The situation, however, was much the same. Into the settled, usually rather stuffy academic atmosphere, the writer—generally a novelist or poet, at any rate an imaginative writer—was inserted. He represented the life of the senses, of the great world, and of art, which in this fiction was opposed to the life of the mind, of the academy, and of intellectual sterility. Inhibitions broke down, repressions were jettisoned, chaos resulted. Wild and woolly, *à la* Dylan Thomas, the poet bedded down the wife of the department chairman; crafty and cunning, *à la* Leslie Fiedler in his own fiction of this sort, the novelist seduced the wife of the overly cerebral young professor. Whatever the variants, the life of the senses won out over the life of the mind, bohemia defeated philistia (academic branch), and the previously intact academic community was left in shambles. The target in such fiction was academic life itself, what was felt to be its stodginess, its self-enclosure, its denial of life's possibilities.

The newer academic novel, in which the student has replaced the visiting writer as catalyst, turns things inward. Although it is still in some sense a novel of manners, the chief impetus behind it is not social criticism but psychological investigation. The student, like the visiting poet or novelist, is the agent of disruption, but he or she is also the occasion for much introspection on the part of the professor-lover, his wife, and the other (shall we say) "grownups" in the novel. In terms of plot, though, the result is often much the same: things break up.

To what end they break up depends upon who is telling the story. In *Other Men's Daughters* Richard G. Stern provides a professor in the biological sciences with a lover who is a young graduate student in Japanese studies. In *The War Between the Tates* Alison Lurie has a professor of political science fall in love with a graduate student in psychology. (Thus, in the academic novel at least, does the dream of interdisciplinary studies become a reality.) Mr. Stern's professor finds great, if somewhat complicated, happiness in his student-lover, and the affair involves him in a spiritual renewal of sorts, a revivification, the shucking off of a tired middle-aged outlook for a fresher and more

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hopeful sense of life's possibilities. "I feel about her," Professor Merriwether remarks, "the way Galileo did about the telescope. My feelings for her enlarge my feelings for other things." Miss Lurie's Professor Brian Tate, through his student-lover, meets disorder but in the final analysis very little sorrow. "He did not realize," Miss Lurie writes, "that he had betrayed not only Erica [his wife], but himself; that he had become permanently smaller and more ordinary." It boils down to a matter of novelistic sympathies. Mr. Stern, being a man and a professor, has profound sympathies for his professor; Miss Lurie, being a woman and a professor (and also a wife), has nothing but contumely for her professor. The one man is made larger, the other diminished, by his liaison with a student-lover.

I have picked out—or picked on—two rather better-known instances of fiction having a professor-student love affair theme at their center. *Other Men's Daughters* received excellent reviews, and *The Battle Between the Tates,* along with excellent reviews, has been a modest best seller. But they are not isolated instances. Some years ago the novelist Alan Lelchuk, in *New American Review Number 4,* published a story, "Of Our Time," in which a variation on the theme was wrought. A young professor has a student, a divorced woman with children and a life of considerable chaos, who comes not only into his classroom but into his bed, forcing him to reexamine the aridity of his well-ordered academic life. In *A Single Man,* published some years before this, Christopher Isherwood played a homosexual variant on the theme, set in a California college. More recently, demonstrating that the phenomenon is not wholly an American one, the British writer A. Alvarez, in *Hers,* his first novel, offers a variation on a variant by staging an affair between his heroine and one of her professor-husband's twenty-two-year-old graduate students. In "The Humanities Building," a poem published in *The New Yorker* last year by Karl Shapiro, things roll along smoothly enough until Mr. Shapiro, describing his own office in the building, notes that in his "cell I hope and pray/Not to be confronted by/A student with a gun or nervous breakdown/Or a girl who closes the door as she comes in." Do such girls come in often, one is entitled to wonder. About the nature of their business no wonderment can be allowed.

Given all this, the question is: Is art, in repeating again and again the theme of the professor sleeping with his students, imitating life? (Goodness knows, life often depressingly enough imitates art—especially bad art.) Do professors often sleep with their students? Are professor-student liaisons now rather a commonplace aspect of academic life? If they are, what does this say about the quality of academic life today? And does it, finally, one way or the other, matter?

A question pollsters have not addressed themselves to is: Do professors often sleep with their students? No statistics are available, nor are any likely to be. The evidence, as the behavioral scientists say, is anecdotal. The anecdotes, one may be sure, are juicy indeed.

A professor at a large university, a man who is also one of this country's well-known intellectuals, tells of a graduate student, known to be a lesbian, announcing to him that she and her lover have decided that they would like to have a baby, and that, after surveying the possibilities for genetic inheritance on the campus, have selected him as the best available candidate for the baby's father.

At another university a professor was having an affair with a student whose dissertation he was directing. The dissertation was of inferior quality, and the professor, with his inordinate interest in having it accepted, jumped to its defense. But it proved a defense of the indefensible. The dissertation was turned down, and the professor, though tenured, was advised to leave the university in a cloud of embarrassment touching everyone involved in the fiasco.

In the office I inhabit at yet another university, some ten years ago a professor asked an undergraduate to remove her blouse. The girl reported the incident to the university administration, and the professor was fired. The then dean, evidently a man of some worldliness, remarked: "I wouldn't have minded so much if he had slept with her. But asking her to take off her blouse—that's sick!"

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A letter arrives from an aquaintance, a professor in his forties, recently divorced, who has been enjoying the fruits of his liberation. It is an amiable letter, chatty and breezy, and toward its close the following sentence crops up: "I must rush off now to see a lady friend—a graduate student, quite young and unformed and rather poor in bed—but I do not shrink from responsibilities."

A moderately diligent researcher, I ask a youngish professor, "Do you think many professors sleep with their students?" He responds: "Do you think many don't?" I ask another, older professor if professors sleeping with their students presents a problem on his campus. He responds: "If you talk to faculty wives, it does."

Where there is so much fire, to reverse the old bromide, must there not be some smoke? In the matter of sex and professors and their students, perhaps there has always been some smoke. At certain progressive women's colleges—Bennington, say, or Sarah Lawrence—love affairs between professors and students were once said to be, if not quite traditional, then not quite uncommon either. Such affairs, incidents, liaisons—terminology, no doubt about it, is a bit of problem here—were probably always carried on, in isolated instances, at any number of universities. Love flourishes in an atmosphere of impossibility; the flames of sexual excitation are often fanned by high risk. And the element of impossibility, and even more the element of risk, was undoubtedly intrinsic to such behavior on the part of professors. Caught at it, a professor risked disgrace, official censure, firing. Are the same stakes involved today?

First, though, it needs to be said that certain unwritten laws were traditionally applied to the sexual congress between professors and their students. At most schools backs were tactfully turned on the love affairs between younger faculty men—teaching assistants, for example, and instructors—and their students, on the sensible premise that such young men were presumably shopping around for wives. If an instructor of, say, twenty-four had become involved with an undergraduate girl of, say, twenty-one—well, there was something rather natural about that. True, such an entanglement might well bring with it certain "administrative" complications. After all, grading the papers and examinations of a person one is sleeping with calls for an ethical delicacy most men do not command. But handled with tact, no great tumult need—nor frequently, one gathers, did—result. Other professor-student pairings were also adjudged permissible, such as a young unmarried professor with even a graduate student in his own department, providing she is not a student under his supervision. On the whole, and within the bounds of a tacitly acknowledged and not unreasonable decorum, the academic community was not intolerant in such matters.

In recent academic fiction this decorum is regularly and rather blithely breached. Mr. Stern's Professor Merriwether in *Other Men's Daughters* is a married man, in his forties, and has children. Miss Lurie's Professor Tate in *The War Between the Tates* is similarly situated: middle aged, married, a family man. The breach is not total, however, since both men take up with graduate students. The academic novel has not yet, one might conclude, taken a Lolitaesque turn. Yet, though the student figure in each novel is a graduate student, both of them, like all representatives of the counter-culture, seem to be a perennial nineteen. Although Mr. Stern's professor goes off with his student-lover, and Miss Lurie's professor leaves his behind, neither young woman at any time seems in any convincing way a victim, or even in much danger of becoming one. If victims there be in these novels, then they are the professors' wives. Certainly they are not the jean-clad, pot-puffing students, who were sexually sophisticated before they came to graduate school. "You cannot seduce anyone," Elizabeth Hardwick remarks in her book *Seduction and Betrayal,* "when innocence is not a value."

The consequences of Miss Hardwick's remark, for literature as for life, are radical indeed. Imagine how differently certain literary classics might have been resolved if set in today's sexual ambiance. *Romeo and Juliet* need not have ended so tragically if the two families had somehow agreed, as they might today, to allow the kids to live together for a while; their passion might soon have

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been spent, and before long the whole thing might have blown over. As for Anna and Aleksey Aleksandrovich Karenina, the solution to their problems is evident—what was called for, clearly, was an "open marriage." Finally, had the legislation for free and easy abortion only come through early enough, Clyde Griffiths of *An American Tragedy*, instead of dying in the electric chair, might now be living with his wife, the former Sondra Finchley, in Fort Lauderdale as the retired chairman of the board of the Finchley factory in Lycurgus—and Theodore Dreiser would have had to have come up with another title.

To return from letters to life, imagine a hypothetical case. Assume a professor at a moderately large university has had an affair with a student, an undergraduate, that he, the professor, chooses to break off. The student returns to her home for the Thanksgiving holiday in a state of shakiest depression. She takes to her room, she weeps, she comes down to meals morose and with red-rimmed eyes. When her parents inquire what has gone wrong, she breaks down and tells them of her affair with Professor Smith. Her father decides not to be philosophical about it. He doesn't find it amusing to expend some $5,000 annually for his daughter's education only to have her sleep with a man twenty years her senior, someone roughly his own age. He returns with his daughter to her campus, bursts into the chief administrative dean's office, and demands that Professor Smith be fired. What is likely to happen?

Twenty, perhaps even fifteen, years ago there could not have been much doubt about the conclusion of such a proceeding. Out went the professor, fired (as the common accompanying adverb had it) summarily. Then sex scandals were unforgivable. Professors could be dismissed for overexplicit discussion of sexual matters, even in biology courses. Preaching free love was dangerous enough; practicing it unthinkable. A famous literary scholar is said to have committed suicide after it was revealed that he had received homosexual pornography through the mails. Thus it was—then. Now, at most universities no one can predict with confidence what scene might ensue in our hypothetical dean's office. Would the angry father be placated and promised that appropriate measures would be taken? Would Professor Smith be called in, apprised of the situation, and good-humoredly requested to cool it? Possibly. But who really knows? In neither *Other Men's Daughters* nor *The War Between the Tates* does fear of official censure from the university play any part; the university's view is, quite simply, of no interest.

A number of objections might be raised to the hypothetical case of Professor Smith and the undergraduate—all of them on the grounds of its unlikelihood. The most interesting, perhaps, is that such an affair is likely to have more significance for the professor than for his student. He, in this view, is much more likely to be left bereft than she. His family, his sexual pride, his hopes of regaining youth—these things and more are on the line for the professor. For the student, the reasoning here runs, all that is involved is an interesting interlude. (Such, once again, is borne out in the depictions of professor-student love affairs in *Other Men's Daughters* and *The War Between the Tates*.) But this objection assumes, of course, that students nowadays, along with being callow about personal relationships, are utterly casual about sex. Is this a fair assumption?

We are all great kremlinologists of the young today: experts on what they are thinking, theorists on their values, researchers into their psyches. We are kremlinologists in the sense that we view the objects of our study as essentially threatening, and work on slender evidence. While we all harbor our private notions, we also take what outside expert help we can get. From Daniel Yankelovich, president of the public opinion firm that bears his name, we get the following in his book, *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 70's:* In the late 1960s "a new code of sexual morality, centering on greater acceptance of casual premarital sex, abortions, homosexuality, and extramarital relations is confined to a minority of college students," but now, in the 1970s, "the new sexual morality spreads both to mainstream working-class youth." This is based on "3,522 one-to-two hour personal interviews" with students conducted by the Yankelovich firm. When I read the supporting

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documentation for such findings, I always wish the pollsters had talked to a 3,523rd student, who might have set them straight and caused them to cancel the entire poll. But let us assume for the moment the correctness of Yankelovich's conclusion, that the new sexual morality, the new sexual casuality as it might better be termed, really is now widespread among students. Does this mean that the professoriat, or at least that portion of it that becomes sexually entangled with students, is free from any possible charge of corruption?

I do not think it means anything of the kind. But the charge of corruption needs to be more carefully made. It is not the young, their students, that such professors are corrupting, but themselves and academic life generally. How? And in what ways?

In a handsomely wrought essay entitled "On Teaching Politics Today," Werner J. Dannhauser remarks on the physical aspects of teaching: "I lecture to hundreds, and my practical eye roams freely and fiercely over bosom after bosom. I fix my tie, briskly enter a seminar room, rejoicing at beauty, regretting homeliness—in both sexes—because teaching is a profoundly erotic activity." Professor Dannhauser is quite correct about the erotic element in teaching, and Socrates before him would have agreed, but what he does not add, because it is beyond the boundaries of his essay to do so, is that the teacher himself is a figure of eros, in all the multivarious meanings of that word. There the teacher stands, behind the lectern or at the head of the seminar table, the man with the most knowledge in a room where knowledge is the only business of the hour, a figure of authority, confidence, intellectual grace—an object, if he does his work even half-well, of love. In the close and charged atmosphere of the classroom, he is a guide, an older brother, a performer, a father-figure, a lover, wrapped into one. Given all this, no wonder the schoolgirl's crush on her professor is a tradition of such long standing.

In the classroom the professor commands. Intellectually, he has all the moves. If he knows his job, he can shimmer with elegance, shine with wit. He travels on steady ground where the earth beneath everyone else is shaky; he is sure-footed where everyone else steps tentatively. In a roomful of William Bendixes, he is Fred Astaire. He leads; they, his students, follow. He has, in a word, power, and power can be sexy. In a coarse reading of the situation, knowledge is power is sex. Among the professoriat there are evidently coarse readers, men who are not above cashing in on their power in the currency of sex with their students. This is not merely aesthetically displeasing—an instance of Beauty and the Beast—but ethically ugly. Even in the harsh ethics of seduction, the guns are too heavily loaded in the professor's favor. Even assuming that sex is of little importance to the liberated young, professor-student sex nonetheless offends one's sense of fairness.

Still, assigning such a high-blown motivation as the acting-out of power relationships to professors who sleep with their students may miss the mark. Possibly the motivation for professors who do so is no different from the motivation of mountain climbers who attempt Everest—they do it simply because it is there. But in another sense the phenomenon of professor-student sex is the all-too-logical outcome of much that has been going on in the university in recent years.

Largely as a result of the political upheavals visited upon the university over the past decade, the campus has been much democratized. Distinctions between teachers and students have been blurred; confidence in once firmly-established hierarchies is shot. An atmosphere of chummy togetherness now reigns—an atmosphere fostered, it should be noted, at least as much by professors as by their students. Increasingly the distance between professor and student has been foreshortened: in dress, in manners, in values. At times it is difficult to tell the players apart without a program, or a faculty directory. In the process, teaching has become less a true calling and more just another job.

Joined to the democratization of university life has been the general worship of youth, which, though initially linked with the political movements of the young, appears to continue unabated. If the worship of youth be a minor religion, professors are privileged to genuflect at the shrine, being located at

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Delphi itself, where they are allowed to consult the oracle daily. To work among the young is to be ceaselessly reminded of one's own inexorable aging—a reminder that, nowadays, begins to set in at around age thirty. With democratization no longer barring easy congress between professors and students, with youth being so ready to hand as an object of worship, the stage is nearly set for the consummation once so devoutly to be avoided: the joining together, the final blurring, of professors and students in the bed.

The curtain and backdrop for this elaborate production has been the enormous amount of attention devoted to the subject of sex in the world at large. As revolutions go, the sexual revolution may be unique in having achieved its final stage so early on. In the sexual revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat is established, with only a single qualification—it has proletarianized us all. With Masters and Johnson our Marx and Engels, with Drs. David Rubin and Alex Comfort our Lenin and Trotsky, we bravely march (though that is not quite the correct verb) into the future.

Sex is in the air, at the door, in the woodwork, and not least in the university, where it has had no trouble permeating what once used to be described as that institution's "splendid isolation." Few could be found today to argue that the university is especially isolated, or for that matter particularly splendid. Fewer would be prepared to argue that the university has been impermeable to the impact of the sexual revolution. (To make an omelet in the sexual revolution you not only have to break some eggs, but scramble plenty of values along with them.) Divorce does not appear to be less common within the university than outside it. Philandery, emergence from various closets, liberations of all sorts are scarcely even noteworthy in university life. In matters sexual, the principal difference between the university and the blowsiest suburban community is that in the former there is more time available to devote to the sexual life and greater opportunities for its exercise. In the phenomenon of professors sleeping with their students, the idea of academic freedom takes on a wholly new, and hitherto unimagined, dimension.

The freedom involved is that of being no better than anyone else—no more swinish, to be sure, but, should the opportunity present itself, no less. John W. Aldridge, the literary critic, in reviewing Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* in a recent issue of *Commentary*, makes much the same point: academic life has been leveled to where it has become virtually indistinguishable from the life of society in general. Mr. Aldridge notes that over the past two decades the realities of life in the university have radically changed.

> Particularly among younger faculty members it is possible to identify a new personality style characterized by a nervous, ingratiating gentility, a seemingly cultivated limpness of manner, a carelessness of speech and dress, an air of humility and apology, that inside or outside the classroom might identify them with equal justice as Madison Avenue executives, television newscasters, junior State Department officials, or, for that matter, junior shoe clerks. Their pretension is, if anything, their complete lack of pretension. Their self-delusion derives not from a belief that they are consecrated to a special calling and are therefore above the temptations that beset ordinary men, but rather that they are no different from anybody else, have no wish to be, and would be satisfied if they could be left alone to pursue the modest pleasures of being ordinary.

Faculty-student sex, in this reading, is essentially another way for professors to assert their ordinariness, which is true but which is also a criticism grounded in snobbery.

But more than a breach of taste, a question of snobbery, is involved. However widespread faculty-student sex may be—and it is worth repeating here that no one knows how widespread it is—certainly it is not epidemic. Among those professors who do not go in for it, and choose to adduce a principled reason why they do not, the reason they offer is that it is "unprofessional." Whatever can they mean? In normal times one mightn't have to ask. But these are not normal times. Not when the *New York Times* carries a headline reading "Sex with Patients Denied by Doctors." Not when a book such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* vaunts sleeping with psychiatrists. Not when a better novelist, John Updike, sets at the center of his new novel, *A Month of Sundays*, an oversexed minister. No,

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these are not normal times. When professors say they do not sleep with their students because it is unprofessional, they mean to imply that to do so is humanly untidy, that it creates a needless mess which can only get in the way of the main job. Perhaps what they really mean is that they do not do so because they fear the stigma of immorality; but they say it is unprofessional because they fear equally the stigma of seeming moral. Faculty-student sex is unprofessional, but it is also wrong.

Aiming high, let us consult Socrates on the subject. Specifically, let us consult the *Symposium,* the dialogue about love. It does not seem perverse to suggest that it is also a dialogue about teaching, which is a form of love, at least as Socrates envisions it in the dialogue. At the end of the *Symposium,* it will be recalled, Alcibiades enters, rowdy and "bottled," as Michael Joyce's delightful translation has it, and, joining the other symposiasts, rather than talk about love, delivers a eulogy to Socrates. In the midst of his eulogy, Alcibiades recounts the most extraordinary anecdote about his attempt to seduce Socrates, an incident curious in itself since he, Alcibiades, was as renowned for his beauty as Socrates was renowned for his ugliness.

Alcibiades took great care in setting things up. He and Socrates went off to the gymnasium together to wrestle and exercise. But it was no go. In an interesting reversal of roles he invited Socrates to dinner, "as if I were the lover trying to seduce his beloved, instead of the other way round." But Socrates left directly after the meal. Alcibiades invited Socrates back again, this time making sure to delay him until a sufficiently late hour so that he could press him to stay the night, which Socrates agreed to do, making a bed for himself on the couch. Later in the night, after the servants had gone off, Alcibiades made his pitch. Socrates heard him out, then said: "And if you're trying to barter your own beauty for the beauty you have found in me, you're driving a very hard bargain, let me tell you. You're trying to exchange the semblance of beauty for the thing itself. . . . But you know, my dear fellow, you really must be careful. Suppose you're making a mistake, and I'm not worth anything at all."

Having made his pitch, Alcibiades next made his move. He wrapped his cloak round Socrates, and, mounting the couch, crept under Socrates' shabby old mantle, taking the older man in his arms. Whereupon—absolutely nothing happened. As Alcibiades told it to the symposiasts: "When I got up next morning, I had no more *slept* with Socrates, within the meaning of the act, than if he'd been my father or an elder brother."

High-blown and poetic interpretations of this anecdote are certainly possible, but at its most obvious level its meaning is clear: the relationship of teacher and student transcends fleshly transaction, is indeed incompatible with it, being a relationship of love but of love that has to do, as Socrates puts it earlier in the dialogue, with "procreancy of the spirit." It is the first and last word on the subject. Its lesson for professors is beyond mistaking—emulate Socrates or join the Gadarene.

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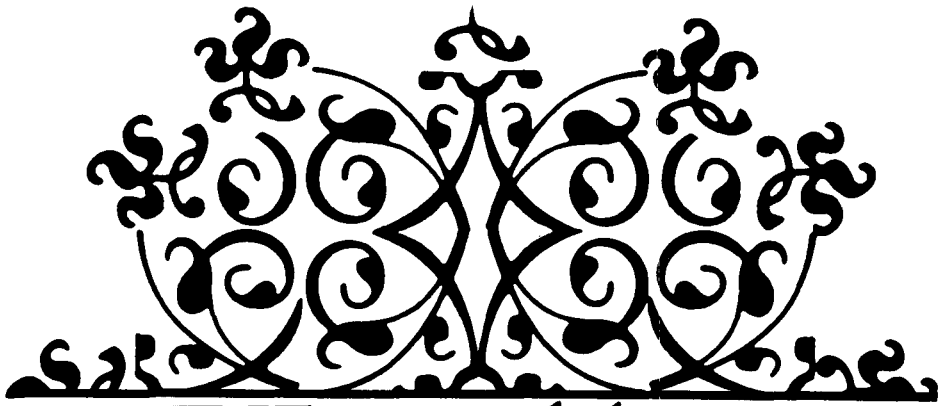

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Machiavelli Now and Here
An Essay for the First World

ROBERT M. ADAMS

Vérité, âpre vérité.—Stendhal after Danton

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AFTER *The Prince* made its first public, posthumous debut, Niccolò Machiavelli was considered a man who deliberately advocated evil and unscrupulous methods in order to deal with political realities that could readily be handled by more enlightened and humane techniques. In painting this picture of the man and his teachings, it was of course advantageous to consider as little as possible the situation in which Machiavelli actually wrote, the princely family to whom he addressed his major book, and the other writings he composed. Commentators like Innocent Gentillet, who held Machiavelli directly responsible for the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, and Frederick the Great, who saw in Machiavelli a diabolic tutor of regicides and usurpers, established a tradition which still has its representatives in Professors Butterfield, Prezzolini, and Leo Strauss. Professor Strauss, who in this company is no extremist, declares in particular that Machiavelli, when he taught the deliberate enacting of evil, represented an entire wicked, authoritarian way of thinking, against which the basic premises of American democracy stand not only as a protest but as a shining exception. Neither in word nor deed are Americans Machiavellian, and this is a very good thing precisely because Machiavelli was such a very bad man. Though we should indeed study Machiavelli, according to Professor Strauss, it will be only to take measure of the various enormities from which we have escaped, and against which we must still be on our guard.

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But of recent years this idea has turned almost 180 degrees around. Starting as far back as Alfieri, but growing steadily in assurance and volume, another tradition has begun to emphasize the idealistic, enthusiastic, patriotic, and democratically minded Machiavelli. This figure is the author of the 26th chapter of *The Prince,* understood not as fine-sounding palaver atop a book of cynical opportunism, but as the sincere expression of Machiavelli's ultimate political objectives. The ardent declaration of chapter 26 is supported by evidence from the *Discourses on Titus Livius,* letters, poems, diplomatic embassies, histories, and biographies; what seems to contradict it, in the earlier chapters of *The Prince,* is explained as the result of special historical circumstances in 1513. Thus we have acquired an altogether new Machiavelli. No doubt there are faults to be found with this new figure. He is unrealistic in maintaining his attachment to a citizen army long after professionals had fully proved their superiority; he verges on the pedantic in his fondness for Roman precedents; and his passionate hatred of the barbarians harrying Italy sometimes obscures his sense of practicality. If a prince promises to drive out the hateful foreigner, Machiavelli is a little prone to think he can do it without the vast human energies painfully molded into a unity that we now know were required. But these are naïve and generous faults, diametrically opposed to those of cynicism and selfish brutality, which used to be laid to Machiavelli's account.

Simultaneously, though by no sort of logical consequence, the other half of the picture has also altered violently. It is by no means as clear as it used to be thought fifty years ago, that enlightened and civilized methods (persuasion, leadership, bargaining) are capable of leading mass populations or of directing international relations toward the ideal aims of peace and justice that we all share. In fact, it is pretty clear that without some curious aids they are not; and so we are less inclined to blame Machiavelli—even accepting that he was as "Machiavellian" as his popular reputation used to imply—for being tarred with a brush that seems to have left its sticky touches on our hands and on practically everyone else's. It doesn't take much ingenuity,

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even accepting Professor Strauss's premises, to draw from them entirely contrary conclusions. Suppose America was founded on non- or anti-Machiavellian principles: well, on the evidence, this experiment in idealism and virtue worked satisfactorily under a particular set of favorable conditions (a rapidly expanding economy, the isolation provided by two major oceans, the comforting presence of the British Empire as a force consciously balancing the big powers against one another, if not always keeping peace among them). But now, as we can see simply by looking around, things are different. Faced with new and complex international responsibilities, sapped by malignant ulcers at home and abroad, a cumbersome giant afraid of its own strength, American democracy can no longer draw strength from its old idealisms. High time then (my devil's advocate might say) to change in the direction of Machiavelli—still taking his name to stand for something like that Elizabethan stage villain who is all that Professor Strauss seems to recognize in our Niccolò.

Machiavelli himself often thought in bilateral alternatives, he had a strikingly either-or style, and his influence has been in the same direction. He tends to polarize people into thinking in terms of opposed extremes. This is certainly what has happened when we start positing a United States of America which is either virtuous and inept or wicked and efficient. But it is equally apparent that a number of circumstances exist to prevent this set of two-way alternatives from ever being posed in real life. For one thing, modern rulers—not only in America, but almost everywhere—are more deeply involved in history, society, and continuing social processes, than any prince of whom Machiavelli could have conceived. Except, perhaps, for the Shah of Iran, no modern ruler exists who has anything like the Italian Renaissance prince's individual freedom of untrammeled decision. Even if they should want to, modern rulers can't be very good or very bad under most circumstances, because they are tied to a constituency or bound by an ideology, or simply don't have the resources for large-scale, long-range, high-powered vice or virtue in a tough, expensive, and crowded modern world.

In fact the concept of war as a prudent commercial enterprise

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grounded in self-interest, which Machiavelli took largely for granted, seems to be obsolete these days. In the early sixteenth century, armies were small, armaments were relatively inexpensive, most campaigns were short, and so there was a genuine possibility of getting enough booty to pay for the work and danger of grabbing it. Today, on the other hand, most organized forms of warfare are absurd and self-defeating. This is most obvious in the case of atomic warfare, which almost automatically wipes out both participants, along with all differences between winner and loser and any conceivable bystander who might try to discriminate between the two. But it is also true in lesser measure of the middle range of wars, where the country that destroys its enemy's economic base (and so is adjudged victorious) almost immediately becomes responsible for rebuilding what it has destroyed. The defeated enemy, starting from scratch, generally winds up with a more modern industrial machine that its conqueror; in addition, being denied arms as a consequence of its defeat, it flourishes because it cannot spend anything on "defense"—the exclusive privilege of the victor. In other words, waging war unsuccessfully may be an indispensable preliminary to waging peace successfully. (This is the premise of that eminently sensible movie of some years back, *The Mouse That Roared;* how natural that it should have been made in a Britain ruined by two successive victories in world conflicts!)

The one variety of warfare that remains relatively free from these absurdities, and therefore relatively successful—at least in certain hands and under certain circumstances—is guerrilla warfare, generally undeclared and only half-organized. This war draws its strength from the fighters' readiness to destroy everything, including themselves, down to the scorched earth, because they are not only confident of being able to start anew, but eager to do so. The various guises of such war include terror, assassination, kidnapping, sabotage, hijacking, and the random murder of civilians and irrelevant innocents. A nation needs little technology for this sort of warfare, but popular support amounting to fanaticism. Traditionally, guerrilla warfare used to be thought efficacious only for defensive actions, as in the defense of a

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homeland against invaders; but recent bloody experience suggests that it can be exported as well, and given an offensive character.

Crude and obvious as it is, this triple division of contemporary warfare suggests that modern avatars of the Machiavellian "tough guy," if they were to exist in the contemporary swim, could hardly resort to one form of violence without either doing fatal damage to themselves or making themselves subject to another sort of violence against which they would have little defense. The means of waging various forms of war are so distributed among the several nations that no particular one wields them all, and all are vulnerable to some. But the more sophisticated the devices of war are, the less the chance of their being used at all. Consequently, those who choose to wield terror can now do so with relative immunity from effective reprisal. Meanwhile those who (for whatever reason) don't have terror in their effective arsenal must find ways to counter or blunt its force, while making sure that they are not forced into the self-destructive absurdities that are now widely and increasingly available.

Old-fashioned "Machiavellian toughness" was simply a particular symbolic language for conveying in capsule form the same prudential lessons as common discourse or persuasion. In the 7th chapter of *The Prince,* we learn of the fate of Ramirro de Lorca, once Cesare Borgia's feared, efficient lieutenant in the Romagna, who (having outlived his usefulness to his employer) was found on Christmas morning, 1502, lying on the public square in Cesena "in two pieces with a stick and a bloody knife beside him." It was a graphic and memorable way of saying, "The stick may hurt, but the knife can cut the stick," or alternatively, "there is a power behind the power you think you hate, that you don't know whether to love or hate, but that you'd certainly better fear." However one defines the message (as with Christian parables, its vagueness is part of its enduring fascination), the fact that the Cesare's action was emblematic instruction acted out on the body of his own ex-lieutenant is very clear. But when random hostages are picked up and butchered, or a bomb is left to go off in a crowded restaurant, killing whom it will, no political point is being made to which a practical response can be framed.

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The kamikaze mentality that leads the terrorist to define himself simply as a bomb to be exploded as loudly as possible against the wall of indifference that blocks his cause (and that of course means by producing maximum outrage) is but one variety of apocalyptic action that cannot be given any political equivalence. Machiavellian calculation in the modern world is therefore an extremely various thing, depending not only on whether one has privilege or not, but on how one stands in relation to public order and calculated, indiscriminate terror.

The apocalyptic revolutionary, who sees existing social orders as corrupt and so assumes the responsibility of making life unbearable within them, justifies himself as performing a painful but necessary surgery; in his own way, he is capable of the old Machiavellianism, and it is relatively easy to deduce from his premises and situtation a number of lucid, if disagreeable, consequences. Being small, his groups must avoid the risks of open warfare against protected targets; they must strike at the weak, the helpless, and the unsuspecting, while sheltering themselves among, and of course provoking attacks upon, the innocent. Like all warriors, they must choose the field, the weapons, and the occasion most unfavorable to the antagonist, and must risk little themselves while forcing the antagonist to risk much. Peace, quiet, and prosperity are the revolutionist's indirect enemies, to be resisted as temptations to torpor and tranquility; he must use, if necessary, the phantom of the ideal to create violent dissatisfaction not only with the intolerable but with the disagreeably bearable. The discontented intellectual must be stimulated to imagine personal resentments over the distresses of the urban or rural *proles* as if they were his own. And the familiar device of "tying things together" should be used to make unemployment, chilblains, the Scottsboro boys, and the military government in Chile seem to be parts of a single giant conspiracy under the command of a shadowy, implacable "establishment." Familiar and obvious as it is, this vulgarization of a vulgarized Machiavellianism works pretty well as a policy, or has done so far—doubtless because it lends itself to the blind slogans of mass politics. But the counter-Machiavellianism of that

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loose, informal coalition known as the First World is less easy to calculate or describe. Not that terror isn't perfectly easy to meet with counterterror, one obscurantism with another. Even in this day and age, there are plenty of blind troglodytes on the loose who ask for nothing better than a cataclysmic showdown, and damn the consequences. But the primary weapons of which the First World now disposes are dangerous to the point of insanity; and that fact alters the whole balance of political options. It is in no sort of Machiavellian self-interest to let oneself be maneuvered into a position where the alternatives are instant self-destruction or prolonged warfare waged with weapons in the use of which one's inferiority is manifest, and one's power to seize the initiative nonexistent.

As a matter of fact, it is no piece of Machiavellian policy to get maneuvered into any conflict, whether winnable or not, without being perfectly clear about what one's objectives are, and knowing what weight is to be assigned to them. If the loose allies of the First World aim to preserve at all costs an already-crumbling structure of privilege—its outlines are too well known to need emphasis—then, given the peculiar character of their technical power, and the probable consequences of exercising it, holocaust seems likely to be the price they will have to pay. But to let the struggle be so defined is itself suicidal; it multiplies and solidifies opponents, welds them into a unity they could never achieve on their own, and at the same time dismays most of one's own potential friends and partisans. Cold realism concurs for once with high idealism in commending another definition of ends. The inequities of privilege must be abated; if this is not done gradually and with a modicum of good will on the part of the privileged, one may expect it to be done violently and with perhaps cataclysmic consequences. The problem, therefore, defines itself as that of laying down a measure of privilege and private power in order to gain a measure of compensatory security from the devices of international cooperation.

There is no way to suggest, in this day and age, that such a transition can possibly be easy. Expecting the modern national state, with its system of teeth, claws, appetites, and instincts to remove its security from its own hands is like expecting a man-

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eating tiger to let itself be fleeced like a lamb. But if we recognize that that decision has already, in effect, been made for us, the only response that makes realistic sense is to start planning a political process far more dangerous and intricate than the acquisition of power—that is, naturally, laying it down. Long ago Pericles told the Athenians a hard truth very applicable to modern times. Perhaps it was wrong of us, he said, to take or get the international position we now hold; but nothing could be more dangerous now than to pretend we don't hold it, or to give it up without consideration of who gets what we resign.

Our problem in the United States is particularly difficult because we are, after a fashion, a republic. Machiavelli himself spent most of his active life in service to a republic, which he found a distressingly inefficient master. His Florentine employers suffered from the traditional failings of republicans—they were inert, dilatory, indecisive, timid, and passive. In revulsion against these failings, Machiavelli, in *The Prince,* recommended a policy which he thought a prince might have some chance of implementing: to describe it, he borrowed a curious term from architecture, *l'addentellato.* The term describes a pattern of finishing a wall, akin to crenellation, which leaves it ready to serve as a base for the next story. The First World is called on these days to practice a kind of *addentellato* building in reverse—to take down the top stories of a structure of privilege in such a way as neither to bring the whole house crashing at once, nor to render it an intolerable habitation for the time being. For there are troglodytes in the cellar, all too ready to come out and defend the structure, lock, stock, and atomic submarine, to the last lurid explosion.

An *Art of Dismembering Empires* has yet to be written; but its first chapter should undoubtedly warn against passivity and helplessness, and its last chapter might do worse than repeat the warning. All sorts of lessons, for example, are to be learned from the last days of the old British Empire, had we only a contemporary Gibbon to investigate the mighty ruins. The record does not, by any means, consist only of awful mistakes to be avoided. Being relatively frank and personal in its dealings with the subject peoples, the Raj could leave behind it in India a large and

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relatively competent cadre of native civil servants. In India, and in other areas of the world as well, the British contributed a common, if sometimes minimal language to regions that would otherwise have lacked one; institutions such as journalism and parliaments, even if neither lived up to anyone's highest ideals, often remained behind as welcome relics of an unwelcome ruler. No one who has ever visited modern Ireland can be unaware of the Irish penchant for cursing the Saxon invader as an unspeakable corrupter of ancient Irish ways, while continuing to imitate him in great matters as in small, for better and for worse. Most important of all, and most readily available for our own imitation and improvement, has been the educational and cultural influence of Britain upon her colonies and ex-colonies. This is the kind of work we Americans generally do badly when we try to do it at all; propaganda operations like the USIS and Radio Free Europe are unashamedly mediocre in their aspirations; but the now-withering Peace Corps and the Fulbright program of exchange scholarships, though picayune in proportion to the need, are evidence that something can be done; and for the price of half a dozen redundant missiles or obsolete battleships, there is no telling what might become possible.

It may seem pitifully unworthy of Cesare Borgia and Alexander the Great to propose that the greatest power of the modern world should abandon its fantasy of holding all the dominoes erect and in line, in order to exercise its real power through education and persuasion—all to the end of laying down privileges it cannot possibly preserve and does not really need. But our ultimate power to destroy, though very real, is not actually usable, and while we hold it over the heads of the nations, we only encourage them to perceive us, and our own people to perceive them, as the enemy. In some ways, our delusion is more dangerous than theirs. For it is plain that the worldwide revolution of our time, though it frequently calls itself "socialist" or "communist," is very largely nationalist, and to that extent neither truly unified nor really resistible. Perhaps in some parts of the world we can hold it back for a while, at the cost of brutalizing both ourselves and our opponents, at the cost of terrible suffering and hideous poverty for

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our own generation and those to come. In effect, though, we would simply be trying to prevent others from doing what we once did ourselves, two hundred years ago. One of the patent truths about nationalism is that over the relatively short haul, and without outside interference, it changes radically. Less than half a century ago, Mexico was a flaming red sore spot of Bolshevik infection in the Western hemisphere, second only to Russia in the East. Both are now relative bulwarks of conservatism, and it is a safe bet that within a few years China and Cuba will be seen to have taken the same path. The longer the current wave of revolutions takes to break, the less it will look like a wave at all, because in many places it will be lost in the inevitable backwash.

As a general rule, it seems to be the stance of most revolutionaries these days to put things together in overall patterns, to agglomerate and "unify" under control of a theory. All particular actions are seen as parts of one overwhelming struggle, which gives shape to extended history and controls the individual's most personal perceptions. Against this, it seems to be the conservative position to discriminate and particularize, to insist on individual facts which don't get their entire meaning from preconceived structures, but alter those structures because they can compel conviction on their own account. It used to be said that Voltaire supplied the corrosive and Rousseau the glue out of which the destructive and constructive elements of the French Revolution were created. Perhaps this was true in the eighteenth century; and wherever the old regime is a structure of dogmatic privilege and arbitrary authority, the two forces probably still remain coordinate. But where the conservative party is itself dedicated to free critical commentary and dispute, while the forces of "progress" hardly pretend to value open discussion or free debate, the balance alters entirely. I am not implying that the division of the world is all one way (conservative friends versus radical enemies of freedom, or any particular permutation of these elements)—nor even that freedom of discourse is under all circumstances of unquestionable value. But the variety of circumstance and appearance is in fact the reason that those who care for freedom's preservation in a world of systems, slogans,

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and empires of the mind as well as of the body, are committed to discriminate, to look behind the facade of the new ideologists, instead of accepting their definition of themselves and everyone else.

Thus the First World need not, and in its own self-interest should not try to, stand like Canute against the rising international tide of nationalism. Indeed, they are rarely friends who would like to see us take this stance. Any pattern of response must be avoided that puts us, automatically, at the mercy of the provocateur, or commits us to more responsibilities than we can sustain. One practical consequence of the situation that can be seen immediately is the necessity of thinking and acting on two levels at once, in terms of things as they ought to be and as in the long run we would like to have them, but also in terms of things as they actually, currently are. Any shouts of moral outrage that greet this proposal can be dismissed as the fake innocence of liberals protecting a virtuous pseudovirginity that grownups got rid of years ago. In the real conduct of international affairs, for instance, every major government in the world carries on an official foreign policy with one hand and the covert operations of intelligence gathering with the other—pretending, of course, that the two activities have nothing to do with one another, but knowing very well that they do. One set of activities is based on the premise that nations deal together in good faith, and so they generally do; the other is based on the possibility that they may not be in good faith, and that is a real and very dangerous possibility too. It is as foolish to neglect one possibility as the other, though pious, simplistic senators sometimes talk for public consumption as if all one had to do was announce a formula and follow it out. Since modern violence is so deadly and unpredictable in its consequences, there is no question that modern man must work toward an order in which rational discussion and negotiations carried on in good faith are the accepted means of settling international differences. But to pretend that things are that way now is, in effect, the surest guarantee that they will never be that way.

Given the first premise of our thinking, that all modern violence

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is incredibly dangerous and the ultimate showdown is to be avoided at all costs, the temptation will surely be great to play the always-easy, always-gratifying role of the hand-wringing innocent bystander. Machiavelli makes amply clear what fate awaits the comedian who assumes this role: his analysis of the pious neutral is as good now as it was in the sixteenth century. Thus the new Machiavellian cannot afford to stand above the scrimmage of everyday life; but when he intervenes, it must always be with an eye to the ultimate goal—the preservation of that area of life subject to negotiation rather than brute force. More important still, the partisan for discourse and negotiation has somehow to make apparent that his motives are disinterested. Even in the sixteenth century, it was common enough for citizens of a commercially-minded city like Florence to be piously devoted to peace simply as a way of avoiding the rough games at which they were no good, and promoting the profitable ones at which they could be sure of skinning everyone else. The Florentines were vigorously hated by their neighbors for their craft in waging peace, and despised for their incapacity to wage war. No group of modern nations can let itself get caught in that bind.

By and large, the comportment of the peace-loving nation in the modern world has to involve an extraordinary measure of self-denial and self-abnegation. That is why peace-loving nations tend to be those that have, in general, what they want; even when, objectively, they can afford to give up some of their privileges, there remains a basic, painful contradiction in asking them to wage peace for the defeasance of their own welfare. But on occasion the cause of peace involves something even more painful for a liberal-minded community, and that is blunt, bold, offensive action. There is no real way out of this, even in the face of our assertion that "all modern violence is incredibly dangerous." If a placatory and concessive attitude were invariably without danger, there would be no question that it should be followed. But not only is it dangerous, it is fatal. For the fact is that in the world as it is (rather than as it should be) long-sustained placatory and submissive behavior will be interpreted as evidence of weakness: it will invite, if not overt attack, at least rapid erosion through

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domineering and intimidation. (One need only think what the state of the union would be if President Kennedy had not stood up to Mr. Khrushchev on the issue of Russian missiles in Cuba.) No doubt the nation that professes to be working for peace will be bitterly reproached for inconsistency the first time it resorts to violence or the threat of it. But it cannot help doing so on occasion, and probably on occasions that answer to the demands of historic convenience, not abstract logic.

A parent who wants to make a child free of an area or an activity will welcome the chance to teach him, in a forceful and memorable way, what the limits of his freedom are; a teacher who has once made clear to a class what he won't tolerate hardly has to worry about discipline again. No intelligent person advocates violence for its own sake. It should be minimal, in terms of necessity; it should make a clear didactic point in concise form; it should be as safe as possible against contagious spreading; it should clearly involve, not the prejudice or interest of the agent, but the general welfare; it should never be half-hearted or indecisive; and it need not be mechanically consistent, just exemplary. If it can't be all those things, it shouldn't be at all. But there are times when it must be.

Idealists will cry aloud that nobody has appointed the United States or any other particular nation to act *in loco parentis* or in any other tutorial capacity to the other nations of the world. Of course not; yet, apart from historical circumstances that are not always rationally explicable (why is one country influential, another one not, or not in that way, or not under those circumstances?), the role of international moderator is always available and sometimes cries out to be filled, not necessarily by one, but by one of several possible nations. If nobody ever assumes it, for lack of a heavenly calling, the consequences are easy to foresee. Unhappily, the time is remote when every nation has exactly what it wants and exactly what every other member of the community agrees it deserves. If force and fraud are generally perceived as the only practical way to effect redistribution and accomplish change, it is only a matter of time until the whole shaky arrangement of international affairs blows up in our faces. Who then is to lay down guidelines if not

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the influential, who are likely also to be the prosperous? Ideally, every country without exception should be subject to the correction process; practically, we all know that is out of the question. Encouraging, educating, enticing, and occasionally forcing unruly governments (including our own) to see that the process of negotiation is more precious than anything that can be gained by sabotaging or short-circuiting it, may not be a possible policy, but it is a necessary one.

In chapter 18 of *The Prince,* Machiavelli says that the ruler must make use of both the beast and the man in human nature; he must appeal to reason, and be prepared to use force or fraud if that fails. The disparity between seeming and being in government affairs is, I suppose, taken for granted by all men who have had the experience of ruling, or who have given the subject even rudimentary consideration. No cynicism is involved in recognizing this chasm. It grows directly out of the general rule that in most enterprises there is an official, theoretical way of doing business which is at wide variance with the way in which business is actually, manipulatively done. Lincoln Steffens used to entertain municipal-reform groups by drawing two abstract diagrams, one of the way city government was supposed to work, the other of the way in which government by influence actually worked; audiences in the know found it easy to fill in the blanks on both diagrams with the names of specific individuals in their communities. Always by definition in public life there is an official, ceremonial, formulaic pattern of things that is laid out for public consumption; and an unofficial, practical, behind-the-scenes pattern of influence that controls the way things are really done. This arrangement isn't the work of criminals; it's the "good" people, the pillars of the community, who want things this way. In the best of circumstances, the ruler (be he prince, president, or prime minister) finds himself in the position of persuading through official formulas a general acceptance of decisions already reached behind the stairs. When persuasion becomes too cumbersome or difficult, he issues executive orders, or establishes bureaucracies that can make decisions agreeable to him, without the awkward necessity of justifying or explaining them. In more

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difficult circumstances he can subvert or suspend even the semblance of due process by a variety of alternative actions all of which depend ultimately on the police power of the state.

This of course is very wicked behavior on the part of rulers; and a long if absurdly repetitious account could be written of the various usurpations and cruel or deceitful practices indulged in by modern rulers. But the other side of the coin is the continued, and sometimes willful gullibility and innocence of the citizenry. It is easy to be a shamefully deceived innocent: to be aware means to be responsible. New generations it seems have to learn slowly and reluctantly and all over again every few years that politics, whether municipal, national, or international, is not a game played by fresh-faced children still glowing from their first encounter with the Boy Scout oath. When we demand milk-and-water professions of moral innocence (amounting ultimately to infantile stupidity) as the price of placing public officials in office, it is only to be expected that we will get a good proportion of unctuous hypocrites, whose secret behavior, when brought to light, proves as foul as their public professions were mealy-mouthed. If our expectations regarding government were more realistic, we might not fall quite so often into the muddy ditch of disillusion.

But if this cycle of messianic expectation followed by deep despair is the pattern of American life in the best of times, with what heart can we confront the problems of American democracy in the dark days that surely lie ahead? Machiavelli plainly felt he was testing human nature to the ultimate in requiring of his prince such contrasting yet intricately compounded qualities. Yet this prince of his was a professional ruler, trained from earliest childhood to the duplicities of authority, and free to operate by his own personal lights in something like a moral and social vacuum. Most important of all, he was following, much of the time, his own self-interest. His tasks were simple and straightforward indeed, compared with those of our technological-commercial quasi empire in the process of diffusion under the storm clouds of atomic power. Our citizens, like citizens generally, navigate by relatively simple moral lights; the theater within which they are

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asked to make, or at least to execute, complex political decisions is nothing less than the entire globe, with implications for the solar system. About the only secure lesson we can draw from a reading of Machiavelli is that we need to become much more sophisticated political animals than we now are. If that means we become less virtuous, as perhaps it does, we may take some consolation from the thought that a lot of our virtue was pretty specious anyway.

The textbook moralities are worse than useless; so are the textbook cynicisms, including those of Machiavelli. What is required of us in the years ahead is an almost superhuman combination of qualities—of principle and opportunism, of restraint and decision, of historic awareness and openness to the unprecedented. In a late chapter of *The Prince* (number 25), Machiavelli himself confronts these dilemmas in a curiously muted and inward discussion of Fortune; his conclusion is a good deal more equivocal than anything in those earlier parts of the book where the prince is being counseled regarding immediate problems:

> If a prince (Machiavelli writes) conducts himself with patience and caution, and the times are right for such conduct, he will prosper, but if times and circumstances change and he does not alter his behavior, he will fall. Nor is there any man so wise as to be able to adapt himself to such changes, both because we cannot be other than as nature inclines us, and because one who has prospered by following one kind of policy will not be persuaded to abandon it.

All formulations about history, including those of *The Prince,* are therefore illusory and dangerous because no set of abstractions can encompass the infinite variability of changing Fortune—which is nothing less than the world itself in its particulars. What Machiavelli can teach us for use now and here is, therefore, nothing more than the value of cold, particular attention to specific circumstances, and alertness in adapting to them. The ultimate aim of these exertions would be to preserve, under whatever power- or privilege-structures we may see, the values of tolerance and open critical discourse—the possibility, in fact, of seeing without ideological blinkers the real, which is the unexpected.

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These are not very precise values, and I am afraid they do not offer any sort of ultimate assurance. Trying to conceptualize the turbulent, many-currented stream of history, one can only hope to preserve the possibility of creating new errors, which will themselves be dangerous as they are persuasive beyond the span of their flickering moment. I do not know of any guarantee that thinking of any sort won't simply lead us a little more painfully, a little more circuitously perhaps, toward inevitable holocaust; that chance is always in the cards, and will be from now on. Yet we can recognize that the danger is there and still go about our daily business of thinking and living as if it weren't. Machiavelli, who himself lived in a world of unpredictable, overwhelming forces, would understand that; and he would understand too the value of a lucidity and rigor of mind sustained in the teeth of the fact that it tells only of our inevitable obsolescence and ultimate loss.

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Double-Header

JOHN STONE

Each and every one of us
has got a schedule to keep.
—a truck driver being
interviewed on radio

I've made it
have been left alone in the stadium
locked here after the baseball
twilight game, having hidden
where I won't tell

on a bet with someone I invented
and therefore had to win.
I can hear the Security Guard
locking up, watch him making his way out,
turning off the lights as he goes

toward home and supper, away from
the smell of popcorn and beer.
I can see him look
with a question at my car,
the only one besides his

still in the lot and see him
look back once at the stadium without
knowing or even thinking I could be
looking back at him, my face barbed
with wire. I turn now to the stadium

that is all mine, bought
with my money, purchased with

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a three dollar ticket for the top tier,
the stadium that is coming alive again
with the crowd that is coming back

but of course isn't coming back
to watch me play, with DiMaggio in center,
Cobb in left, Hornsby at second,
Rizzuto at short, and all the others
who have been tagged out more than once

themselves, and who will get me later

or sooner, trying to stretch a single
into a double, catching up with my lost breath
that I can remember now from when
I was eleven, with a stitch in my side

sprinting still in spite of the stitch
for the inside-the-park home run
I almost had when I was twelve
for the girl I almost got when I got
old enough but didn't know the rules

dusting my pants off now
to the music I never learned, for
the symphony orchestra I never conducted,
my hands rough with rosin
for the truck I never drove

and the fish I never caught
and wouldn't have known if I had
how to take him off the hook,
for my father who is in the crowd
cheering out his heart

but who of course isn't there
as I pull up lame at second
with a stand-up double

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in this game that goes on for hours,
my hands stinging with the bat,

the All-Stars aligned against me
in this stadium I own for the night,
one great circle and inside this circle
this square that seems the only one
on this curving darkening ball of earth

or the only one anyway
marked by bases I must run all night
for everything I should
by now
be worth.

✪ JOHN STONE is a physician in Atlanta, where he teaches at Emory University School of Medicine. His first book of poems is *The Smell of Matches*.

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The Promise of Dirty Words

JOHN P. SISK

WHEN BARBARA LAWRENCE'S SHORT ESSAY, "Dirty Words *Can* Harm You," appeared last year in *Redbook,* it was no more likely to endear her to tough-talking feminist extremists than to their male counterparts for whom *Portnoy's Complaint* is in the grand tradition of liberating obscenity. Professor Lawrence argued that much of our brutally frank and currently voguish sexual vocabulary is "implicitly sadistic or degrading to women" in its intent "to reduce the human organism (especially the female organism) and human functions (especially sexual and procreative) to their least organic, most mechanical dimension." At the same time, she was struck by the irony that many teachers, critics, and writers who are insensitive to this verbal degradation of women are "eloquently angered" and "piously shocked" when ethnic or minority groups are similarly denigrated.

Barbara Lawrence has my sympathy and, with some qualifications, my agreement. It may be an oversimplification for her to imply a clear incompatibility between the familiar sexual crudities and the woman's liberation movement, but the crudities are likely enough to be antiwoman in their immediate reference. The problem is with the irony she points out. The inconsistency is really there, but it is largely, I believe, a surface matter, though nonetheless objectionable. Beneath the denigration of women, which is so out of agreement with verbal squeamishness elsewhere, is another, and in its implication even more disturbing, motive which, consciously or unconsciously, uses the denigration of women as a means of expression. One of the best ways to see how this happens is to observe how one of our older contemporaries, Iago, behaves in Shakespeare's *Othello.*

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Iago is not only a great denigrator of women, but he is also typical of the modern debunker. He is, as he says of himself to Desdemona, "nothing if not critical." His problem is how to maintain some kind of control in a universe that must be meaningless if he is to be safe, but in which he is continually threatened by mysterious, meaningful powers. He belongs with those characters in Shakespeare—for instance, Hamlet, Lear, Leontes of *The Winter's Tale,* Timon of Athens, and Thersites of *Troilus and Cressida*—who have temporarily or permanently lost faith and for whom the denigration of women is both symptom and symbol. Such persons dwell in their "critical" hell from which escape is made difficult or impossible by their fear of salvation. This hell, however spiritually sterile and even agonizing, lends itself to the illusion not only that it is all of reality but that it is quite controllable by those smart enough or tough enough to act on this information.

Iago demythologizes and denigrates in the interest of limiting and organizing his world. What threatens to complicate it, and therefore remove it from his control, is the possibility that apparent virtue is real virtue. Desdemona, as most of us know, is genuinely virtuous, a splendid variation on the Griselda figure (her best-known ancestress is the heroine of Chaucer's "The Clerk's Tale") who demonstrates her constancy in an extreme testing situation. She points to a moral, metaphysical, and theological order that threatens utterly to invalidate Iago's universe. There is therefore some desperation in him when he insists to the doting Roderigo, "She must have change, she must." Later, when Roderigo exclaims that Desdemona is "full of most blessed condition" and Iago explodes, "Blessed fig's end! The wine she drinks is made of grapes," he is not simply deflating Roderigo's sentimentality; he is protecting himself from an alternative that would force him to revise everything. He is what an unillusioned and smarter Roderigo would be—a man "converted" to the dirty and liberating truth that Desdemona is nothing but an attractive cunt. This is the view to which Iago converts Othello. Iago's need to convert others is at least as strong as the need to "diet" his revenge; his disenchanted world is always threatened by the en-

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chanted believers outside, especially if, as he says of Cassio, there is daily beauty in their lives that makes him ugly.

From Iago's point of view, of course, the impulse to degrade and desecrate is liberating, and few people can read or watch the play without sharing some of his liberated zest as he transgresses against, and transcends, the moral and social norms that restrict his adversaries. In the end, reality proves to be far too complicated for him, but in the meantime he has the kind of freedom from established limits that characterizes the animal or human figures in animated cartoons—which is the same thing as saying that he is in part a comic figure, a practical joker who revels in the exhilarating game of trying to outwit the mysterious, meaningful powers. The most favorable position one could take toward him would require pushing this liberational element as far as it would go. In that case it would become clear that we want to get rid of Iago for the same reason that we want to get rid of Sade: we can't stand that much freedom and that much reality. We prefer to be captives of value structures and self-transcending (therefore self-denying) causes, even at the cost of living derivative and hypocritical lives.

Considered in such extreme terms, it is easy to see the true hierarchy of Iago's hates and degradations. Before all else he hates civilization and culture for the intolerable burdens they are and the ego-diminishing service they command after one has lost faith in them as meaningful enterprises. Desdemona throughout the play and Othello before his fall represent civilization's effort to maintain itself through a dramatic embodiment of necessary virtues. Together as happy lovers shortly after their arrival in Cyprus, they exemplify that harmony of complementary elements which mirrors the cosmos itself but which to Iago is the ultimate threat to his nihilistic integrity. Therefore he says in an aside:

> O, you are well tuned now!
> But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
> As honest as I am.

His objective will be to liberate himself from all possible threats of

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this harmony by destroying its immediate symbols, and to do this he will convert Othello to his own liberated and obscene view of Desdemona. In the process he will demonstrate the extent to which a full, free, authentic, and creative life can be associated with repeated acts of degradation.

In this reading of the play, of course, Shakespeare is really, if clandestinely, on Iago's side, giving expression as best he can to his own radical unease with the culture. This is that blackly pessimistic but utterly courageous Shakespeare who, some critics are convinced, captivated Melville and helped to shape that mighty degrader, that passionate and misogynistic antiestablishmentarian, Ahab. Such a Shakespeare may, of course, be nothing more than a convenience created to validate one of our post-romantic pieties. Shakespeare's good men and women have an embarrassing tendency to accept the burdens of culture as the condition of humanization, not as its adversary.

It is possible to locate, however dubiously, a "good" Iago only because acts of degradation can be positive or negative, oriented to a new and more valid order or subversively, even compulsively, directed against all order. Positive or creative degradation can reduce rank, value, or prestige in the interest of a sounder, or more humane, or more rational or virtuous arrangement of priorities. We pull down false gods and smash icons in order to purify our worship. A significant consensus now, for instance, regards the American Revolution, the labor movement, the extension of the franchise to the propertyless, blacks, and women, and the early 1960s civil rights movement as positive acts of degradation, though each was once seen by its adversaries as shockingly and dangerously disrespectful of an established grading system. Put this way, the distinction between positive and negative degradation seems hopelessly relative. Degradation is simply inseparable from consciousness-raising or growth in individual critical awareness. If we lived in a high-synergy culture in which, as Abraham Maslow puts it, "social institutions are set up to transcend the polarity between selfishness and unselfishness," we would have occasion to do very little degrading—but on the other hand we might

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have very little personal autonomy and we might even be comfortably fascist, Castroist, or Maoist.

But we live in a low-synergy culture in which social, political, moral, and religious institutions are widely felt to be fundamentally hostile to authentic, autonomous life—or hostile to an as yet unrealized order whose aim would be to foster such a life. Our time has much in common with that gnosticism of the early Christian centuries which—for all its psychological pessimism, its sense of the cosmos as prison, says Hans Jonas in *The Gnostic Religion*—still "holds out the possibility of stripping off one's own soul and experiencing the divinity of the absolute Self." Certainly we are familiar enough now with this nihilistic gnostic libertinism which permits a spiritual elite to use the natural realm indiscriminately out of a conviction that the latter has no positive relation with a higher order of reality. No doubt any culture will become low-synergy and gnostic in proportion as liberation becomes for it a primary object of conscious pursuit. The spirit of liberationism is necessarily defiant and transgressive to the extent that, as Jonas points out, "we find sometimes the freedom to do everything turned into a positive *obligation* to perform every kind of action, with the idea of rendering to nature and thereby exhausting its powers." In this view, the burden of culture and civilization is the cosmos "seen only in its aspect of compulsion which thwarts man's freedom." No longer possessed of the venerability of the Greek cosmos, says Jonas, it merits only contemptuous epithets: "these miserable elements," "this puny cell of the creator." Its nature is to be out of tune.

Iago, of course, must not be confused with gnostic superstars like Simon Magnus and Marcion. He is a faithless gnostic; this is why he seems so modern to us. His contemptuous epithets are in the interest of no grand metaphysical, theological, or mystical schemes. Although he may sometimes seem to be aware of an affinity with the Devil, it is hard to see in him an element of self-transcending service to an evil principle. All his actions are directed to the survival of the isolated self; he acts like a man driven by the fear that if he ceases to raise hell he will cease to exist. Hence he is a compulsive degrader who anticipates the fate of the modern

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isolato whose ideal, at its most extreme, is total autonomy. For him, therefore, acts of degradation become not only substitutes for virtue but indispensable means of self-definition and survival. One might even feel sorry for Iago. If he were alive today, his program of permanent degradation would have the support of an elaborate rhetoric of liberation and he would be able to see himself in some kind of self-transcending dimension.

An important difference between Iago and his modern descendants, however, is the fact that he not only does not need such support but would probably ridicule it if it were offered to him. To his critical eye, everybody's wine is made of grapes. He is in fierce competition with established virtue but is himself not much bothered by the need for moralism. For most modern degraders, on the other hand, the act of degrading has become a moral habit —in fact, a substitute for cultural virtue. Or to put it in the degrader's terms: thanks to the highly moral and even heroic work of the degrader, cultural virtue is now revealed to be the corruption it fundamentally is and always has been. The degrader, then, is the protagonist in a virtue story; he must depend on this story's action for his moral well-being. Only those transgressors whom Philip Rieff in his recent *Fellow Teachers* calls "triumphant therapeutic communities of one," those who in their nonheroic way have gotten beyond good and evil, appear to be living quite comfortably without the support of this story—though they can be accused of being freeloaders whose freedom depends on the moral effort of those who remain the story's captives.

The predicament of the faithless gnostic degrader is therefore his symbiotic moral dependence on what he degrades. Surely this dependence helps to explain why, three quarters of a century after the Victorian Age, we are still so conscious of the need to resist Victorianism. Our degradational and highly critical spirit could no more dispense with Victorianism than the world of Ingsoc in Orwell's *1984* could dispense with the legendary heretic Emanuel Goldstein, without whom Big Brother's world would deteriorate for lack of moral fervor. Late twentieth-century Victorianism has become a metaphor for culture, understood as the complex of all those forces that conspire to thwart the individual's aspirations to

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be autonomous—that aspire, in gnostic terms, to enslave his *pneuma* or spirit. This metaphoric Victorianism is the real enemy in two liberated products of literal Victorian culture: Oscar Wilde's 1891 essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," and Mark Twain's famous and bawdy underground pamphlet, *1601*. It is the real enemy against which that late Victorian, Frank Harris, was tilting a half century ago in his autobiography *My Life and Times,* just as it is the enemy (Jewish version now) against which Philip Roth is still tilting in *Portnoy*.

The metaphor of Victorianism is, after the fashion of metaphor, wonderfully economical. It organizes its attack on culture around sexual repression, just as Ingsoc organizes its attack on the forces that oppose it around the metaphor of Goldstein. An inevitable consequence is the eroticizing of both establishment and antiestablishment politics. The Nixon-Agnew-Mitchell hard line against obscenity and pornography (once a comfort but now, I imagine, an embarrassment to the Keating-led minority of *The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*) was doubtless less important as a concern with literal pornography and obscenity than as a sign that Nixon, Agnew, and Mitchell were, like Frank Harris and Alex Portnoy, captives of the metaphor of Victorianism. For them, too, sexual liberation meant both the liberated *pneuma* and political liberation, but with the terms of the melodrama reversed so that they were the bad guys.

When Barbara Lawrence objects to the degrading view of women implied in the " 'rich,' 'liberating' sexual verbs so fashionable today among male writers," she is in opposition to a powerful combination of forces. To begin with, she has against her something that probably has to be taken as a constant in our culture: men's fear of overdependence on women, of which male chauvinism and female chauvinism are symptom and countersymptom. This fear, grounded as it is on the male's biological and psychological dependence on women, can be subject to great complication and intensification, depending on the environment in which the individual grows up. He may come to fear that the dependence will be permanently crippling (especially if he has

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been induced to strive for a particularly chauvinistic male ideal). He may so strongly identify with woman the overwhelming and potentially destructive power of sex that woman becomes the symbol of all mysterious and threatening power (the malign Earth Mother). He may discover a powerful threat to his autonomy in his own capacity to idealize woman, so that she comes to represent the threat to him of all that he can idealize; or, to put it another way, he may discover that woman, as she exists in his imagination and emotions, is intimately involved with forces and processes that impel him to deny some of his deepest and most subversive impulses if he is to shoulder his share of the burden of human community.

I assume that somewhere along the line most men experience most of these fears to some degree, just as I assume that somewhere along the line most women, to some degree, experience a correlated body of fears—which is only to say that the effort to civilize and acculturate is an effort to survive in a precarious situation. All human societies attempt to domesticate these fears and the hatreds that are potential in them, so that they do not become too destructive to community-making. Thus, a society tries to keep the battle of the sexes, which is at bottom the battle for individual survival in the face of conflicting pressures, at the level of comedy, farce, and ritual gesture. Or put it this way: a certain amount of degrading activity—ranging from the merely tension-relieving, through the good-natured, comic, and farcical, to the ugly and vicious—is the inevitable by-product of any ongoing cultural process. The existing body of denigrating and desecrating obscenities in a society is a reflexive record of the extent to which it has been pressed by its pieties. *O Calcutta!,* for instance, records the power of the tradition of romantic love in our culture, both degrading and defining the image of woman in that tradition. (And insofar as that image has any base in the fundamental nature of woman, it is fundamentally degrading to woman.) Similarly, the numberless obscene post-Watergate Nixon jokes were a reflexive record of the force of democratic political ideals in America, and because they were largely sex-degrading male creations (which did not keep many liberated women from enjoying them) they were

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also degrading to women in Professor Lawrence's sense—though neither sex nor women was what they were really about.

The dirty words that Barbara Lawrence objects to always appear in contexts where they are the familiar cultural reactions to forces that threaten to overpower, overawe, or overabstract. There is a variety of reasons for them, some of which are bound up with the legitimate needs of literature (to say nothing of the exigencies of nightclub comics). Sociologically, they correspond to that "real language of men" with which Wordsworth believed he could re-identify only by smashing the icons of poetic diction. Hence, like many degrading gestures, they may function to keep the lines of communication clear, though their tendency to establish themselves as a new poetic diction is by now notorious. But the dirty words are also vehicles to carry the modern gnostic conviction that culture is basically evil—evil because it restricts free expression of impulse while it imposes ego-limiting commitments and roles, and imprisoning piety-fictions. When Professor Lawrence complains about those words, some of her opposition simply places her beside Nixon, Agnew, and Mitchell on Victorian grounds—in opposition not only to Iago but to the degradational gnostic morality of the whole liberation impulse. She puts herself on the side of Desdemona and the uptight culture-bearers, where she is in danger of being confused with those women who have made Marabel Morgan's *Total Woman* a best seller. Since she is a professor of humanities at State University, Old Westbury, New York, it also puts her on the academic hot seat—for the academy is still an enclave in which the metaphor of Victorianism is as important an organizer of information as the computer room.

Professor Lawrence speaks of her difficulty in persuading students that dirty words really can do harm. Caught up in their current romance with strong, funky, gut-honest, liberating existential language, they have nothing but scorn for "phony-sounding middle-class words like 'intercourse' and 'copulate.'" Anyone who has attempted to teach literature to the young, anyone who can remember his own youthful encounter with modern literature will remember this romance (if indeed he does not remain its captive, out of a fear of ceasing to be young himself). In Western

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civilization, at least, the young are naturally, and almost innocently, degraders of pieties and violators of taboos as they attempt to survive and define themselves in an environment of threatening and mysterious powers. Often they learn from their elders how to put their transgressions in moralistic terms lest, in their efforts to be at ease, they only frighten themselves more. In a low-synergy culture such as ours, where acts of degradation tend to be synonymous with virtue and dirty words turn into holy words, there is a natural inclination to intensify the conventional cult of youth as a means of establishing a salvational image for adults. For much of the New Left, for instance, the youth of Berkeley became more authentically radical, and a more comforting symbol for sympathetic adults, as they escalated from the free speech movement to the dirty speech movement. Since adults often connive at or actively encourage the degrading acts of the young (especially when it is convenient to reduce those acts to virtuous political motivations), they are often accused of corrupting the young. This view lacks both charity and imagination. The "corrupters," recognizing that youth can degrade with a licensed abandon not possible to adults, may only be asking the young to corrupt and save them. (And if, after their fashion, the young promise more than they can deliver—or if, egged on by salvation-needing adults, they promise what nobody could ever deliver—the adult disillusion and anger will be great indeed.)

Pornography, dependent as it is on images of youthfulness and on displays of sexual energy possible only to the young, is one of the extreme forms of youth cult. It is a kind of pastoral in which the sex-seeking male is liberated from the burdens of age and the burdens of community-making as they are experienced in loving relations between men and women. Male pornography degrades woman as a person in order to be free of her as a person, but ultimately to degrade culture; and the converse is of course true of female pornography. As the objective correlative of the masturbatory urge, it is the purest and most gnostic form of sex. This is what has made it so available in the past decade as an all-purpose liberation symbol, and why attempts have been made to see it as a serious art form. Insofar as it is believed to be genuine art, por-

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nography can command respectful attention for doing what art is now widely respected for doing: for opposing culture in the interest of authentic "living." The moralistic rhetoric for this elevated (and ultimately political) pornography has been so well diffused in our culture that someone like Linda Lovelace, the star of *Deep Throat,* is able to say in her "exclusive intimate story," *Inside Linda Lovelace:* "I want to see the day when sex will be an accepted thing, and violence will be outlawed. I think children should be allowed to see sex openly if they can watch violence every day of their lives." She admits that she is not the most original thinker in the world, but she does not have to be. The pastoral myth of pornography, with its naïve assumption of the natural opposition between sex and violence, does her thinking for her.

But Professor Lawrence must also count among her enemies those women who are just as interested as are pornographers in degrading the traditional image of themselves as cultural burden-bearers. They may still feel just as uneasy, even as vaguely threatened, by the obscene and pornographic as they are by radical lesbianism, but they are so circumscribed by the degradational rhetoric of liberation that they can find no way to separate themselves from anyone who lays claim to it. Such women are victims of the package maneuver, an intimidating tactic generally employed with the effect of blackmail by those who dwell in the extremes of a movement, where on a clear day (and out there it is always a clear day) it is possible to see forever. In this heady environment—in which, it was once thought, only the radical Right was at home—complicated issues are apprehended in stark either/or terms and thus make economically organized packages in which any one item is equal to every other item and to the package as a whole. Thus it seems only reasonable to say to halfhearted allies or potential converts, "Buy the whole package or nothing, and buy it all without question, or consider yourself a part of the enemy and damned."

In this particular package the necessary assumption is that all liberations are equal, while the correlative assumption, expressed in the metaphor of Victorianism, is that all restrictions are equal. Perhaps Lillian Hellman had the unworkableness of these assump-

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tions in mind when, in an AMERICAN SCHOLAR forum of distinguished women, she remarked: "I think there is a difference between the women's movement and women's liberation. Liberation is a kind of silly word, a self-serving word." The trouble with liberation is not so much that it has become a cliché through overuse and abuse by a variety of movements, but what it has tended to do to its users. At this point in history, liberation may seem to have everything going for it as a rallying cry and as a public relations gesture. As are all super-honorific terms, it is strongly resistant to critical examination; like a setting hen, it warms equally all the eggs one can put under it. The problem, however, is with liberation as a goal or prime reason for action, as against liberation of some sort as the consequence of a particular action—the liberation, say, of one's capacities for full citizenship as a consequence of winning the right to vote. "Considered in a historical context," Sidney Hook has remarked, "the cry for freedom becomes meaningful only when it is a demand for specific freedoms justified by a consideration of the consequences of exercising them or denying them." A liberation movement that is not bound to specifics is likely to have the ironic and generally demoralizing consequence of discovering simply what no one ought to have to look very hard to find: the ineradicable restrictiveness of the human condition. In proportion as unspecified liberation euphoria takes over a movement, restrictiveness becomes the real enemy, and the movement embarks on a course of escalating degradation in which it is overwhelmed and ultimately defused by the multiplicity of its options.

So we have one of the late-arriving benefits of an affluent, information-crammed, low-synergy culture: the possibility of degradational activity as a sanctioned and moralistic way of life. So too we have the inconsistency that Professor Lawrence notes among her academic peers: their tolerance of obscenities that degrade women alongside their intolerance of obscenities that offend their liberal pieties. Iago's course of total degradation, in which the pegs that make the music possible are all set down, is simply too frightening for most degraders. They need finally to believe that they are on the side of some angels, which means that

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they need the support of the rhetoric of liberation, even when for them it is only an empty rhetoric that implies the gnostic paradise in which they cannot believe.

I suspect that the dilemma for many of the women (and men as well) who are uneasy with Professor Lawrence's stand against the liberating dirty words is that they are just as uneasy with the ethos they rely on for support against that stand. The promise of the dirty words is relief from a cultural burden that is conveniently identified as a remnant of Victorianism—or, more narrowly, male chauvinism—but that may have been more accurately identified by J. D. Unwin in *Sex and Culture* as the burden of opposing sexual permissiveness in the interest of conserving cultural energy and maintaining civilization. Historically, this burden has meant, among other things, the idealization of woman as a quest figure along with the ideal of self-abnegating male service as a correlative means of dramatizing necessary cultural virtues. It has made Desdemona possible and kept the Iago forces at bay—a fact that has been spelled out in fictions that range from the romances of chivalry to old-fashioned western movies. But this has also meant, Unwin points out, "depriving the female of the species of certain rights which she seems entitled to enjoy."

Indeed it would be possible to argue from Unwin's study that women are culturally more important than men, that men know this and have therefore institutionalized women in a manner most likely to reduce the culturally destructive sexual rapacity of males and to compel their cooperation in community building. Obviously such an argument is no more attractive to women now than Unwin's forty-year-old prescription for the good society is attractive to either sex: complete sexual equality with economic and social organizations altered "in such a way as to render it both possible and tolerable for sexual opportunity to remain at a minimum for an extended period, and even forever." Such a formulation is not out of line with some of the conclusions in Robert Heilbroner's *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect*; but to a society in which faithless gnostics have so much to say, it is simply modified Victorianism, and very nearly a prescription for hell.

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As for the uneasy women, they are in the position of being promised relief from one burden on the condition that they accept another burden—that of the necessary degradation of their sexuality which goes with the demand that they accept dirty words (and the ethos that accompanies them) as holy words, giving up their traditional special assignment as culture-upholders to assume the new special assignment as culture-degraders. I suspect that the demand that this new burden be accepted is itself at bottom a not especially subtle form of male chauvinist liberationism. (One thinks of the extent to which Shulamith Firestone's vision of a sexual utopia derives from that male chauvinist gnostic, Wilhelm Reich.)

It is interesting to note that this burden is accepted in some of the trashier magazines addressed to women (*Loving, Revealing Romances, True Experiences, Daring Romances, Exciting Confessions, Real Love Stories, Viva, Playgirl,* et cetera) just as enthusiastically as it is offered in counterpart publications addressed to men (*Mustang, Gallery, Man's Delight, Oui, Penthouse, Debonair, Cavalier, Swank, Playboy,* et cetera). An assortment of these magazines arranged on a newsstand as a garden of earthly delights (their pointless sexual segregation a parody of old-fashioned modesty) asserts a transgressive togetherness whose basically male theme is that the sexes that degrade themselves together will be free together. At the same time, of course, these publications are American and are nothing if not moralistic, with a great deal of talk about the imperatives of self-fulfillment, of facing up honestly to one's natural impulses and deepest needs, of becoming a "total person," of refusing to accept the limited options imposed by male chauvinism, of resisting the obscenity of Victorian prudery, et cetera. Indeed the specter of Victorian prudery haunts the junk literature of male and female liberation the way sinister medieval monks used to haunt gothic romances, so that one is constantly reminded of Freud's dictum: "An obstacle is required to heighten libido; and where natural resistances to satisfaction have not been sufficient men have at all times erected conventional ones so as to be able to enjoy love."

To encounter sexual degradation on the mass-cult level is to see

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what is true of it at any level: the incoherent nature of its attack on metaphoric Victorianism. This is another result of unspecified liberationism and the impossible burden it places on sex. The psychiatrist Natalie Shainess has criticized the liberation-oriented Masters and Johnson enterprise for having "tended to detach the sex act from the words, feelings, and emotions of desire and love." One of the more bizarre consequences of such detachment (Swift would have been delighted to incorporate it in Book III of *Gulliver*) was the famous penis-sensitivity test performed for the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. Experiments of this sort suggest to Dr. Shainess a direct connection between our failure to learn that "sexual expression is not separate but a part of the person" and the fact that as a people "we have become compulsive voyeurs" who make best sellers out of books like *The Sensuous Woman, The Sensuous Man, The Couple,* and *Inside the Sex Clinic.* In a concurring criticism of our incapacity to see the cultural complexity of our degradational pieties, the psychologist Judith M. Bardwick writes of the many liberationists of both sexes who "equate role change with freedom," unaware that the new roles, like the old ones, "will provide frustration as well as fulfillment." This is to say nothing of the simplifying moralism that pervades the ethos of the dirty words as one finds it in so much of the literature addressed to men and women: that role itself, being a product of culture, functions only to frustrate and restrict.

Dr. Bardwick and Dr. Shainess understand sexual relationships in holistic terms. From their position, the cultural rejections demanded by the woman's new burden appear to be nonholistic acts of negative degradation—or, to borrow a phrase from the British scholar Frances Yates, acts of "indiscriminate iconoclasm." Indiscriminate iconoclasts of necessity approach role with a fanatic simplism. Dr. Bardwick's assumption is that role is a constant of the human condition, as indispensable to communal relationships and unity as to self-definition. The assumption implies a Renaissance celebration of variety and contrast as principles of organization and intelligibility in the sensible universe and as the basis of all grading systems. In this view, the burden of civilization is inseparable from the burden of role-playing, and

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transgressive gestures within a culture are necessarily role-degrading—whether as temporary relief from the pressures of acculturation, or as efforts to adapt roles to changing cultural conditions, or as efforts to achieve a condition of gnostic liberation beyond role. The obscenities Professor Lawrence complains about are attacks on role. They get strong support (often, of course, unconscious) from the conviction that there is a radical disjunction between role and nature: that role is the immediate source of all that is divisive, unjust, and person-diminishing, and that if it can be effectively degraded out of existence, nature will be possessed or repossessed.

Yet it is role-organized culture that has made it possible to dream of a condition of personal autonomy beyond the reach of role and culture, so that nature has to be imagined as favoring an infinite variety of autonomous persons who exist together in complete harmony. Modern gnosticism, being faithless and earthbound, is of necessity anarchistic. Unfortunately even its anarchism is faithless, not only incapable of Proudhon's or Kropotkin's optimism about human nature but subverted by the cultural discovery that degradation under a moralistic cover can itself be a satisfactory way of life. The sons of Iago are generally too symbiotically dependent on what they degrade to be counted on for a serious effort in any program of positive degradation. They are also sentimental degraders, trapped by the vitality they have been able to derive from acts of degradation.

Alex Portnoy is a sentimental and trapped degrader—a degrader of women, certainly, the most thoroughgoing in literature this side of pornography, but ultimately a degrader of the culture to which he is symbiotically joined. At the end of the novel, Dr. Spielvogel's observation, "Now vee may perhaps to begin," is the end of an elaborate joke; it is not possible to believe that Alex is going anywhere but where he has been, or indeed has any real desire to. His last intelligible words are, "But at least while I lived, *I lived big.*" Here one can see that a major factor in the popular success of the novel is the complex nature of the pleasure it offers the male reader. It is a drawn-out scream of rage

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against the constrictions of culture for which the reader comes prepared. The cultural scapegoats—the mother, all women in their capacity to compel dependence or to demonstrate or suggest mysterious and threatening power—are as familiar as the stereotypes of *commedia dell'arte* farce. The language has that obscene and liberating honesty of toilet-stall graffiti that has come to be one of the marks of authentic literature; it gives integrating shape to the mixture of pleasure and pain in the hell of victimization with which the reader, insofar as he is himself a compulsive degrader, is already familiar. It is truly a *big* life in widely understood terms: erotically and transgressively action-crammed.

Alex, as a trapped and compulsively degrading liberal, as a setter-down of the pegs upon which traditional harmonies depend, is also an example of the inconsistencies that bother Professor Lawrence. He is a denigrator of women who celebrates all the good causes. He reads *PM;* he is an executive for the New York Commission on Human Opportunity; he is a defender of blacks and Puerto Ricans against racial injustice; he hates "America First"; he is capable in fantasy of dedicating his life "to the righting of wrongs, to the elevation of the downtrodden and the underprivileged, to the liberation of the unjustly imprisoned." He is a negative degrader for whom the rhetoric of positive degradation is simply another dimension of his hell. The "Good Alex" who, it periodically seems to him, he might have been—an impossible hyperbole constructed out of random impulses which, if it could be realized in fact, would result in a monster of virtue—simply defines his self-degradation.

Alex is a caricature Everyman who is torn between his good and bad angels and for whom those angels have become hopelessly confused. What he would like most of all is to get beyond guilt and shame. "Why must the least deviation from respectable conventions cause me such inner hell?" he complains. "Why is the smallest thing I do for pleasure immediately illicit while the rest of the world rolls laughing in the mud?" Why can't he be like those lucky ones who "come down from the crimes they commit [without] so much as a case of indigestion"? Why, in short, can't he be the Iago-opposite of the "Good Alex"—the liberated, conscience-free

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transgressor, free of all angels, that his culture so infuriatingly dangles before him as a real possibility? He has, after all, says Morris Dickstein, inspired female writers like Erica Jong and Iris Owens "to talk dirty and tell it straight," to say nothing of having prepared the way for the masturbatory adventures of Marilyn Coffey's *Marcella*. Why, having performed such liberating service, is he still bound to his rock?

As Alex sees it, his impotence is directly connected with his Jewish conscience and its capacity to inspire a crippling sense of sexual guilt and shame. His position is the one Erich Heller suspects in Freud (himself anything but a shameless man): that the alliance between sex and shame "far from being rooted in human nature itself . . . results from some dark conspiracy." Heller's own conviction (see his essay "Man Ashamed" in the February 1974 *Encounter*) is that "the price of individuation is shame," which the Greeks elevated to the status of a goddess (Aidos) and to which they linked reverence, piety, and respect for the person. It is a fundamental disposition of the psyche, "the negation of which leads to extreme states of inhumanity" (which is true enough whether one thinks of Alex Portnoy or the sexual atrocities of Nazi concentration camps). The manners of shame may change, but it "cannot be done away with by the machinations of history if human nature is to have any definite attributes at all." For Heller it follows, then, that "the campaigns of shamelessness, although they may be waged in the name of liberating ideologies, consciously or unconsciously have as their end the crippling of humaneness."

Heller's essay is eloquent and powerful in its wide-ranging scholarship, but the position he argues for is traditional enough. If the tradition is now largely unavailable to so many, the reason is that the present epoch, "quick in forgetfulness, obtuse to damnation . . . has sold all entrance tickets to the past." Jonas, having retained his own entrance tickets, reinforces Heller, especially in his epilogue to *The Gnostic Religion,* "Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism." Unwin and Rieff also reinforce him, as they reinforce Professor Lawrence. Rieff, speaking of John Barth's *The End of the Road,* contrasts primitive man with the barbarism of modern psychological man who "throws no veils." "Be grateful for your in-

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alienable sense of guilt," he writes. "Without an elaborately cultivated transgressive sense, there can be neither aristocracies of the feeling intellect nor democracies of obedience." All three offer cold comfort to Alex Portnoy: culture is a conscience-burden from which one is relieved only to pursue a lower state of affairs.

Heilbroner himself gives cold comfort to the likes of Geoffrey Barraclough, who view him with some dismay as a liberal conscience in a state of capitulation. In the meantime, however, Heilbroner reinforces Heller, for there is an economic dimension to what has traditionally been known as shame. It is hard to read *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (or any of Heilbroner's recent work, for that matter) and miss its implication that shamelessness as part of a program of liberating and degrading permissiveness is a luxury that our culture will not be able to afford for very long. An Alex Portnoy is simply one of the expensive obscenities of history. Heilbroner discourages those "who would hope that the challenges of the human prospect would finally banish the thralldoms of authority and ideology and foster the 'liberation' of the individual," or who would assume that "man ultimately makes himself in a benign manner." He sees little reason to believe that man will be able to go on reveling in extravagant and heretical thoughts, or attempting to strip himself of all his false consciousness and divest himself of all the delusions and falsities that have misled him, without settling "into a state of existential despair, or [relapsing] into a suicidal solipsism." The postindustrial era Heilbroner envisages is one in which "men and women, much as they are today, will set the pace"; it will "stress parsimoniousness, not prodigal attitudes," as well as the "acceptance of communally organized and ordained roles." With its dependence on tradition and ritual, it will, he suspects, be relatively static. It will be close to that social condition in which, as Hugh Hefner has put it, a man will not have to choose between "enjoying life and having a social conscience, looking out for yourself and other guys as well," but with consequences for the impulse-releasing playboy quite other than Hefner had in mind.

What Hefner did have in mind, I think, was a society that would somehow manage to combine the benefits of a high-synergy

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culture (relative lack of friction between private and public demands) with the pleasures of a faithless gnosticism. It would fulfill Wilde's requirement of relieving us "from the sordid necessity of living for others" but would not be presided over by the sentimentalized and liberated Christ upon whom both Wilde and Frank Harris ground their moralism. Its own need for moralism would be taken care of by its unremitting and zestful degradation of whatever in its environment opposed its only sanctioned form of transcendent aspiration: its commitment to that greater self one may become through the strenuous consumption of goods, services, experience, and other people. Such a society would revel in extravagant and heretical thoughts, but its reveling would be as sentimental as its gnosticism would be faithless. It would be shameless, burden-rejecting, and service-abhorring, lest the autonomous individual be demeaned and diminished. In it Alex Portnoy would rise gloriously from his couch, prepotent and shriven beyond all need of further shrift. Spielvogel, like Othello, would lose his occupation. Iago would come into his own, recognized at last for the culture hero that he is, and Desdemona (transmogrified, perhaps, to a nude foldout) would be exposed as a meretricious cultural artifact.

Heilbroner with his "Malthusian forebodings" (as Barraclough has designated them) is about as likely as the Club of Rome to predict a long life for such a society. Marcuse, I imagine, would suspect that it smells too much of the "pubertarian revolt" which he now believes the New Left must purge itself of. Its greatest contribution to any subsequent society might be, not its experiment in liberation, nor its collection of honest dirty words, but the Victorianism which in the interest of its own survival and enjoyment it had to keep alive.

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The Conservative Imagination
Michael Oakeshott

GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB

IN THE TITLE OF HIS FIRST VOLUME OF ESSAYS, published in 1950, Lionel Trilling perfectly captured the spirit of the time. "The Liberal Imagination"—not "the liberal philosophy," nor "the liberal creed," nor even "liberalism"—implied a mode of thought that was more cultural than political (although it did have political consequences), that depended more upon sentiments and attitudes than upon ideas (although it did have intellectual implications), and that was unquestionably the dominant force in American life. So dominant was it that Trilling could find no "conservative imagination" to set beside it, nothing but occasional, erratic, conservative "impulses," "irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas."

Trilling was absolutely right about America circa 1950—about America circa 1975, many would argue. But in England at that time there was one thinker, enjoying a somewhat subterranean reputation, who exemplified what might well be called "the conservative imagination." Michael Oakeshott preferred the term "conservative disposition"—"disposition," like "imagination," intending to convey a temper of mind rather than a set of ideas, a spirit rather than a philosophy or political creed. His most influential book, *Rationalism in Politics*, a collection of essays that appeared in 1962, has just been republished by Barnes & Noble. It merits rereading, not only as a foil to what is still the prevailing liberal imagination but also as a measure of the adequacy of a "disposition" as distinct from a philosophy or creed.

If we find much that is curious in Oakeshott's intellectual career, we may only be confirming his suspicions about the

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rationalist mentality that expects people to conform to a fixed and predictable pattern. But the curiosities are of some interest. For many years Oakeshott was a lecturer in history at Cambridge University. Yet he has never written a work of history, not even a historical essay; the closest he has come to it has been a provocative article on the "activity of the historian. The great work of his early period is the philosophical treatise, *Experience and Its Modes*. Published in 1933, it was an extraordinary feat for a man of thirty-one. No less extraordinary is the fact that for over forty years he refrained from writing anything else like it, anything as systematic, abstract, or extensive. Only now has there appeared a work that can qualify as its sequel. *On Human Conduct* will merit, and receive, the most respectful attention. Yet in a sense it comes too late to affect his reputation or influence.

When Oakeshott was appointed to a chair at the London School of Economics in 1951, it was neither a chair of philosophy nor of history but of political science. In his inaugural lecture, he paid tribute to the previous occupants of that chair, Graham Wallas and Harold Laski. He did not have to dwell on the obvious irony of the situation: that a self-avowed conservative should be taking the place of two notable socialists in an institution generally regarded as the citadel of socialism. He did delicately allude to the fact that while his two predecessors were great teachers, firmly confident of the truth of their teachings, he was as thoroughgoing a skeptic. But he did not follow through on the paradox that a disbeliever in political science should hold the professorship of political science.

One might be inclined to give him the title of political philosopher instead of political scientist, were it not that he is equally skeptical of the usual claims of political philosophy, skeptical of the possibility of any legitimate relationship between philosophy and politics. The philosopher, he insists, has no practical lessons for the politician or the student of politics—except, perhaps, the lesson that politics is and should be totally independent of philosophy. "Political philosophy," he has said—again ironically, in his inaugural lecture, addressing the most highly politicized university in the country—"cannot be expected to increase our ability to be successful in political activity. It will not

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help us to distinguish between good and bad political projects; it has no power to guide or to direct us in the enterprise of pursuing the intimations of our tradition."

Abjuring both political science and political philosophy as these are normally understood, Oakeshott has nevertheless acquired a distinguished body of disciples, and not only in the academy but among journalists, writers, and men of affairs. In this respect he cannot, to be sure, compete with Harold Laski, who had an enormous influence over an entire generation at home and abroad (and who still seems to play a dominant intellectual role in parts of what was once the British Empire). Oakeshott's appeal is to a much more limited circle. But he is unquestionably the best-known and most respected intellectual spokesman for British conservatism. And he has achieved this eminence with a minimum of intellectual exertion on his part. Unlike Laski, who wrote voluminously and encyclopedically, Oakeshott's corpus of work is modest, both in quantity and in tone. *Experience and Its Modes* might have been expected to usher in an illustrious and productive career. Instead it was followed, in the prewar period, by a single essay a year and by a totally undistinguished volume of selections, evidently intended as a textbook, entitled *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*. He was somewhat more prolific after the war (he spent the war years in the army), editing an edition of Hobbes's *Leviathan* with a substantial introduction and averaging an essay or two a year for the following decade and a half. It was not until the reprinting of ten of these essays in 1962, in *Rationalism in Politics,* that he finally attracted the attention of a larger public. Since then his writing pace has slackened somewhat, but the re-publication of *Experience and Its Modes* in 1966 and of *Rationalism in Politics* in 1974 testifies to the high regard in which he is held. It is typical of Oakeshott that he has had these books reprinted exactly in their original form, without so much as a new introduction or preface.

These apparent anomalies—the political philosopher who has so modest a view of the task of political philosophy, the intellectual who is so reluctant a producer of intellectual goods, the master who does so little to acquire or cultivate disciples—these are, of course, no anomalies at all. They are perfectly in

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character, entirely consistent with the conservative temper as Oakeshott himself understands it. In the case of anyone else, it might be thought odd that a political philosopher should have written so little about the classics of political thought. In Oakeshott's case, it is understandable that only Hobbes, with whom he has a special affinity, should have inspired him to lay aside his casual, bantering tone and engage in the kind of serious analysis required by a serious thinker. As if in mockery of the traditional function of political philosophy, he entitled one book co-authored by him *A Guide to the Classics;* the kind of classics he had in mind was revealed in the subtitle, "How to Pick the Derby Winner." If the title was facetious, the contents were serious enough—or at least as serious, in Oakeshott's scheme of values, as any other subject occupying a civilized man. His disciples take delight in his being a racing man, in his having owned a racing horse (or was it a stable of horses?), and in other evidence of his disdain for academic solemnities and bourgeois proprieties. They take this as existential confirmation, so to speak, of his philosophy, his conviction that all activities, including politics, are to be understood in their own terms and enjoyed for their own sakes rather than subsumed under rationalist categories and made to serve utilitarian ends.

For Oakeshott, Rationalism is the great heresy and the unfortunate tendency of modern times. (He consistently capitalizes "Rationalism" and lower-cases "conservatism," which is itself a commentary on his use of those terms.) The Rationalist, taking "reason" as his only authority, is necessarily hostile to any other authority: tradition, habit, custom, prejudice, common sense. It is the nature of the Rationalist to be at the same time contentious and optimistic: contentious because "there is no opinion, no habit, no belief, nothing so firmly rooted or so widely held that he hesitates to question it and to judge it by what he calls his 'reason' "; optimistic because he "never doubts the power of his 'reason' (when properly applied) to determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action." The Rationalist has no respect for the seemingly irrational vestiges of the past, and little patience with the transitory arrangements of

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the present. He has only an overwhelming yearning for a future in which all will be made orderly, reasonable, of maximum utility and efficiency. And he would like this future to realized as soon as possible. Hence his is the politics of "destruction and creation" rather than the "politics of repair." He wants no patch-up jobs, no tinkering with this or that, still less the kinds of changes that come about without the direct, conscious, rational intervention of men. He sees life—social and political affairs as well as the life of the individual—as a series of problems to be solved, of felt needs that have to be instantly satisfied. And they can be solved and satisfied only by a set of rationally devised techniques that are of immediate, universal, and certain application.

Although Oakeshott puts the Rationalist's "reason" in quotes, as if it were a special, spurious kind of reason, he does not elucidate any other kind of reason to which the non-Rationalist can lay claim. Instead he identifies the Rationalist's "reason" with technical knowledge in contrast to practical knowledge. "The sovereignty of 'reason,' for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique." The Rationalist cannot credit the legitimacy of any kind of knowledge which "can neither be taught nor learned, but only imparted and acquired," which cannot be laid down in rules and precepts because it involves a sensitivity, artistry, and intelligence that comes only from long exposure to traditions and habits that have proved themselves in practice.

Although Oakeshott is often accused of being "elitist," there is nothing precious or recondite in his notion of practical knowledge. His metaphors and analogies are thoroughly commonplace; they come from cooking, racing, gambling, carpentry, sports, love—activities common to all people although not all people excel in all of them. He concedes that there is some degree of technical knowledge involved in all activities; this is why there can be manuals of cooking, gambling, even lovemaking. But to think that such manuals are any substitute for practical knowledge is the modern fallacy. The author of one such manual, he recalls—he coyly refrains from identifying himself—had gone to some pains to point out that there were no precise rules for picking a Derby winner, that there were no shortcuts for the kind of firsthand familiarity with horses that was once more common than

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it is today and that made for a kind of intelligence that no amount of rules could supply. Yet some readers of the manual—"greedy, rationalistic readers, on the look out for an infallible method"—thought they had been "sold a pup" because the book did not bring them up to the level of men of genuine education, those who had long and intimate experience of racing and betting.

Oakeshott rarely speaks of liberals or liberalism, probably because he himself has too high a regard for liberty to apply those honorific labels to his antagonists. But it is obvious that in describing rationalism, and in characterizing it as the prevalent mode of thought in our time, he has in mind what would normally be called liberalism. Moreover he has no hesitation in speaking of himself as a conservative and in praising the virtues of the conservative disposition. The most explicit statement of this disposition is the essay "On Being Conservative" written in 1956, a counterpart to "Rationalism in Politics" written almost a decade before. After his uncompromising indictment of the Rationalist mentality, he evidently felt it necessary to provide a positive statement of an alternative mode of thought and behavior. Yet even without this essay, the alternative is abundantly clear in everything he has written. And that alternative is always in the form of a disposition rather than a creed—a distinction Oakeshott properly insists upon and that many of his critics perversely choose to ignore. He does not defend philosophical doctrines or even take political positions in the usual fashion. Instead he defines himself in terms of attitudes and habits of mind and conduct that pervade all aspects of life. His disposition is exhibited in personal more than public affairs, in the intimate, daily activities of life more than in the large political decisions. It has, to be sure, political implications, and Oakeshott does not hesitate to spell these out. But it is precisely his point that politics is only a small part of life and not the most important part, that it is only the rationalist, wanting to effect large social changes, who inflates politics and thus deflates man's humanity.

The key word describing the conservative disposition is enjoyment. Where the Rationalist, pursuing reason, is always seeking something that is not, the conservative prefers to enjoy whatever is. He enjoys family and friends, as he also enjoys his liberties; he is

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loyal to them as they are, and is not discontent because they are not different or better. The popular conception of the conservative is of a person who idolizes the past. For Oakeshott, the conservative is one who esteems the present and therefore values whatever the past has bequeathed to the present. He esteems the present not because it is more admirable than any conceivable alternative but because it is familiar and for that reason enjoyable. And enjoying the present, he realizes how much he would lose if it were gone. Oakeshott admits that if the present were arid, if there were little or nothing in it to enjoy, the conservative disposition would be inappropriate. But the present is rarely, in this sense, intolerable, except to those who are ignorant of the resources of their world and of the "opportunities for enjoyment," or to those who are so captivated by the Rationalist impulse, the desire to make the world conform to their ideal, that they see the present only as a "residue of inopportunities." If the old are more apt to be conservative than the young, it is not, as the young are inclined to think, because the old are more fearful of what they might lose by change but because time and maturity have taught them the value of what they have.

Nor is the conservative, as Oakeshott describes him, averse to change as such. He recognizes both the need and the inevitability of change. The question is how to accommodate change. The conservative proposes to do so by small doses rather than large, out of necessity rather than ideology, gradually, slowly, incrementally, naturally, with a minimum disruption of life. Where the Rationalist thinks innovation to be a good thing in itself, the conservative regards it as a deprivation, a loss of something familiar, regrettable even when necessary. To him all innovations are inherently equivocal, a compound of gain and loss—and not only because of their unanticipated consequences but also because of their predictable effects, the fact that a change in any part of life inevitably brings with it a change in the whole texture of life. Thus the true conservative resists unnecessary changes and suffers necessary ones.

The disposition to be conservative is, then, warm and positive in respect of enjoyment, and correspondingly cool and critical in respect of change

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and innovation: these two inclinations support and elucidate one another. The man of conservative temperament believes that a known good is not lightly to be surrendered for an unknown better. He is not in love with what is dangerous and difficult; he is unadventurous; he has no impulse to sail uncharted seas; for him there is no magic in being lost, bewildered or shipwrecked. If he is forced to navigate the unknown, he sees virtue in heaving the lead every inch of the way. What others plausibly identify as timidity, he recognizes in himself as rational prudence; what others interpret as inactivity, he recognizes as a disposition to enjoy rather than to exploit. He is cautious, and he is disposed to indicate his assent or dissent, not in absolute, but in graduated terms. He eyes the situation in terms of its propensity to disrupt the familiarity of the features of his world.

It is typical of Oakeshott, and infuriating to his critics, that he should introduce the subject of politics only midway in his essay, "On Being Conservative." But this is entirely fitting in his own scheme of things and implicit in the very idea of "disposition." The conservative disposition is an attitude toward life rather than a particular mode of politics, and politics itself is defined and limited by that disposition. Like everything else in life, politics is a matter of experience and habituation. "Political education" is not an indoctrination or even elucidation of political principles, but rather the elucidation of the traditional practices and activities characterizing a nation's actual political life. Similarly, government is an activity rather than a system, and a narrowly conceived activity at that.

> Governing is a specific and limited activity, namely the provision and custody of general rules of conduct, which are understood, not as plans for imposing substantive activities, but as instruments enabling people to pursue the activities of their own choice with the minimum frustration, and therefore something which it is appropriate to be conservative about.

The function of government is not to bring order out of the disorder that is the essential condition of society—a society consisting of a multitude of people engaged in a great variety of activities, acting out of a multiplicity of motives, interests, passions, reasons. Government is not intended to direct these activities to a more coherent, rational end, or to instruct or edify the people, or to make

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them happier or better. The function of government is nothing more or less than the function of ruling, in the sense in which an umpire may be said to rule, by administering the agreed-upon rules of the game without himself playing in the game; or in which a chairman presiding over a debate rules, by seeing to it that the disputants observe the rules of order without himself participating in the debate.

This sense of government commends itself, Oakeshott insists, not because it derives from some philosophical or political principle—the principle, for example, that freedom of choice is an absolute value, or that truth and goodness emerge only from the complete and unfettered diversity of activity and opinion. (Oakeshott does not mention Mill by name, but it is quite clear that he is dissociating himself from the argument of *On Liberty*.) The conservative assigns a minimal role to government simply because he accepts the "current conditions of human circumstances": the fact that most people are inclined to make their own choices and find their happiness in doing so, the fact that they pursue a variety of enterprises and hold to a variety of beliefs, the fact that there is no large design but only an incessant, changeful, multitudinous activity. These are the facts of life, and the function of government is simply to respect these facts. And it can do so by making and enforcing those rules of conduct that are themselves part of the accepted facts of life. With such rules (as distinct from the Rationalist's contrived rules), the conservative is comfortable, both because they are familiar and because they leave him free to do what he wants to do.

If this modest conception of government—government as umpire or chairman—distinguishes Oakeshott from most modern liberals, it also distinguishes him, and quite as sharply, from many conservatives. Oakeshott is well aware of alternative modes of conservatism, but reading the modern situation as he does, he pays less attention to them than to the Rationalists of the progressive variety. He makes short shrift of those conservatives who rely not upon a disposition but upon a principle or creed: the idea of God, or original sin, or natural law, or organic society, or the inviolability of the human personality. To Oakeshott, these or any

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other principles intended to legitimize the social order are "high-falutin metaphysical beliefs." They are not only unnecessary; they are potentially dangerous, since, like any other Rationalist ideal, they tempt government to do more than it should do. "The conjunction of dreaming and ruling generates tyranny": this is the ultimate mischief of Rationalism—of conservative rationalism, presumably, as much as of the more familiar and far more pervasive liberal rationalism.

That Oakeshott is as far removed from these traditional conservatives as he is from the most rationalistic liberals is evident in his attitude toward religion. One might expect him to be personally skeptical about the existence of God, of a providential social order, or of a divinely ordained morality; and at the same time sensible of the power of these beliefs, their deep roots in the habits, institutions, and activities of ordinary life. Other thinkers have managed to combine private disbelief with a sensitive regard for the public dimensions of belief—and not as a Machiavellian strategy for social control but out of a proper deference to the opinions and behavior that have long characterized civilized life. Oakeshott especially, one might think, would be respectful of religious sensibilities and would take a disrespect for those sensibilities as the mark of the Rationalist mentality. The last sentence of his essay, "On Being Conservative," sums up the conservative disposition in the expression "coming to be at home in this commonplace world." One might read this as an invitation to be at home in the religious beliefs, rituals, and establishments that, however attenuated, are still part of this commonplace world—not, perhaps, as important a part as the horseracing, betting, cooking, fishing, and other homely activities that he dwells on so lovingly, but still, for many people in many places, a not insignificant part of their world.

Yet when Oakeshott speaks of religious institutions, he does so begrudgingly. He tolerates them not as a means of giving expression and actuality to religious faith but rather as a means of restraining that faith: "They [conservatives] might even be prepared to suffer a legally established ecclesiastical order; but it would not be because they believed it to represent some unassailable religious truth, but merely because it restrained the indecent com-

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petition of sects and (as Hume said) moderated 'the plague of a too diligent clergy.' " And when he mentions specific religious beliefs—God, divine law, and the like—it is only to dismiss them together with all other "highfalutin metaphysical beliefs."

Experience and Its Modes does contain a brief consideration of religion—four pages in a 350-page work, which itself tells us something about Oakeshott's estimate of the weight of religion in the totality of human experience. At one point he actually credits religion with being "practical experience at its fullest." But he goes on to say that religion, unlike other forms of practical experience, is "characterized everywhere by intensity and strength of devotion and by singleness of purpose." Several pages later, distinguishing between "practical truth," which is conducive to "freedom," and "errors of practice," which "enslave, . . . mislead our conduct and endanger our lives," he makes it clear that religion belongs to the latter category. A footnote quotes Hume: "Generally speaking, the errors of religion are dangerous; those of philosophy only ridiculous."

One can understand Hume's fear of the dangers of religion. He was close enough to the Puritan experience, and a witness in his own day to the Methodist revival (*A Treatise on Human Nature* was published the very year of that revival), to feel a lively sense of the practical, even political, power of religion, of the passion it might evoke, and of its divisive, sometimes catastrophic social effects. But Oakeshott, priding himself on his practical common sense, can hardly share that fear—not, at any rate, for the England of his own time. One would like to credit him with foreseeing the religious passions that were to be unleashed in other parts of the world. But he never intended to legislate, or even philosophize, for the whole world. It is only in his world, his kind of civilization, that the conservative disposition is appropriate. One sometimes suspects that his world is confined to England itself, that it does not even include America, let alone the Third World.

If he is so ill-disposed toward religion, it is because of something very like an ideological animus against it, a dislike for religion itself, for the very idea of religion, for any idea that has the presumption of truth. Oakeshott's essay on conservatism starts in a benign mood of tolerance, a disposition to respect the multi-

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plicity of beliefs and activities that make up society. It ends by counseling a "mood of indifference," a restraint upon belief itself, a preference for attenuated beliefs that do not put too much strain upon society, finally for an indifference that does not believe at all.

A disposition that makes of religion an insidious form of rationalism must be no less suspicious of morality—the form of morality, that is, which consists in the "self-conscious pursuit of moral ideals." Just as the polity is ill-advised to pursue conscious social ideals, so the individual is ill-advised to pursue conscious moral ideals, the Rationalist fallacy lying in both the consciousness and the pursuit of those ideals. And just as the polity, for Oakeshott, does not depend on any ideas of divine or natural law, so morality does not depend on moral sense, intuition, conscience, or even the "habit of reflective *thought*." All it does depend on is the "habit of *affection* and *conduct*." "We acquire habits of conduct, not by constructing a way of living upon rules or precepts learned by heart and subsequently practised, but by living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner: we acquire habits of conduct in the same way as we acqure our native language."

The parallel between morality and politics falters at one point. In politics a reliance on habit—in the English political tradition, as Oakeshott understands it—tends to limit the role of government and give greater latitude to the individual. In morality a reliance on habit is apt to have the opposite effect: to enhance the role of society, if not government, and to restrict that of the individual. Moral habituation is a training in social conformity. To the extent to which it succeeds, it would seem to belie the variety and individuality Oakeshott attributes to conservatism. Oakeshott denies that this is a necessary consequence of his position, that the "moral eccentric" is in any way excluded from the framework of the "moral life." On the contrary, he sees the impulse to dissent as deriving from the moral tradition itself: "There is a freedom and inventiveness at the heart of every traditional way of life, and deviation may be an expression of that freedom, springing from a sensitiveness to the tradition itself and remaining faithful to the traditional form." The deviant, even while he is protected in his deviancy, does not constitute a threat to the moral life, any more

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than a change in moral habits is a threat. Since the moral life is not conceived of as a system, since it does not depend upon any set of principles or intellectual rationality, the abandonment of any part of it does not entail a collapse of the whole. The moral life goes on, with all its deviations, anomalies, irrationalities.

Oakeshott's image of the moral life is attractive and even persuasive—until one considers the experience of the past decade (and of many earlier periods of history, but the recent period will do in illustration). When *Rationalism in Politics* was first published in 1962, some critics said that it reflected the temper of the fifties but was inappropriate to the sixties. The critique of Rationalism—so this argument went—was congenial to those who had been disenchanted by the postwar Labour government, with its blundering attempts at social engineering, its irritating paternalism, its mean-spirited austerity. But to the generation of the sixties, imbued with the spirit of reform and seeking to rectify social inequities, Oakeshott sounded negative and querulous, lacking in compassion, committed to an outmoded and unjust *status quo*, hopelessly out of tune with the new social sensibility.

There is something in this identification of Oakeshott with the fifties and his dissociation from the sixties, but it is not quite what his critics were then saying. It was not the advent of a new social consciousness that made Oakeshott seem irrelevant; on the contrary, that turn of affairs made his admonitions all the more timely and urgent. What gave even a sympathetic reader pause, however, was the experience of the late sixties when it became apparent that something like a moral revolution was taking place, that moral deviancy, like so much else, was being popularized and democratized, and that it was not the occasional eccentric who was rejecting the traditional values, morals, habits of thought, and behavior, but an entire generation.

Where, one might ask Oakeshott, were those traditional habits of mind and conduct that should have prevented the excesses of the decade—not only the sporadic excesses of violence but the more pervasive and sustained disrespect for law, authority, and tradition? Where, in this age of alienation, was the disposition to prefer the familiar, to enjoy the present for what it is, to accept the facts of life and make the best of them? And where, once this revolution

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has taken place, once the old habits are no longer habits, can one look for guidance? For the new generation, what is the source of that "practical education" that depends not on rules and precepts but on "living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner"?

The logic of Oakeshott's position might suggest that the conservative should acquiesce in the new modes of mind and conduct, adapt to the present realities whatever they might be. But what if these new modes are essentially anarchical, if they so illegitimize social authority that they constitute, in effect, a "permanent revolution"? What basis is there, in this state of affairs, for a conservative disposition—or, indeed, for any stable society to which the conservative can be well disposed? What happens, in short, when the "adversary culture," to use Trilling's apt phrase, has become the dominant culture?

One can hardly fault Oakeshott for not having anticipated the cultural revolution of the sixties; few people did anticipate it. Yet the conservative, more than anyone else, might have been expected to do so, since he has traditionally been sensitive to the precariousness of social arrangements, the fragility of the social fabric. The French Revolution had hardly started before Burke had taken its full measure; long before a republic was seriously contemplated, he spoke as if it were an accomplished fact; while Wordsworth and Paine were blissfully celebrating the dawn of a new age, Burke was delineating the shape of the Terror that was to come. But Oakeshott, as he often reminds us, is no Burke—not even a Burkean. For Oakeshott, Burke is only another variety of Rationalist, a believer in religion and religious institutions, in natural law, in an organic society held together not only by the bonds of habit but also by the bonds of the natural order: "the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place." From Oakeshott's perspective, these "metaphysical beliefs" are the ideological props of weak minds. Yet it may be that these beliefs gave Burke a purchase on reality that Oakeshott does

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not have, a means of understanding reality and judging it—and resisting it, if need be.

Oakeshott is properly distrustful of ideology in the sense of a total commitment to a structure of belief that is presumed to be adequate to every occasion, that serves both as theory and praxis, that professes to be scientific even while it evokes all the passion associated with religion. What is disturbing, however, is his tendency to equate ideology with ideas, to be equally suspicious of both, to be impatient with the very exercise of mind.

In one of his most eloquent essays, Oakeshott describes the kind of "conversation" that constitutes civilized discourse—and that has its analogue in all civilized intercourse. Conversation, he says, may have intervals of reasoned argument, but it cannot be that entirely or even largely. It must be hospitable to plays of fancy, flights of speculation, irrelevancies, and inconsequentialities. It speaks in many voices, recognizes no authority, requires no credentials. It asks of its participants only that they have the ability to converse and the good manners to listen—not that they reason cogently, make discoveries about the world, or try to improve it.

Oakeshott's essay is as elegant, urbane, gracious, and civilized as the ideal of conversation that is conjured up in it. One feels churlish in finding fault with it. Indeed any criticism exposes one to the charge of being unduly earnest, hence insufficiently civilized. Yet if one attends to Oakeshott's argument—and for all his debonair tone he obviously intends us to do so—there is cause for disquiet. Consider, for example, a typical sentence: "As with children, who are great conversationalists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness is only play." Were it not for passages such as this, one might be tempted to think that what he means by civilized conversation, indeed by civilization, is what Matthew Arnold meant by Hellenism: a free play of mind and imagination, in contrast to the Hebraism that was excessively moralistic, utilitarian, and philistine. But when Arnold praised Hellenism, it was not "play" he was praising but precisely play of *mind*, a high seriousness in the service of rationality and intellectuality. Nor would Arnold have lapsed into the romantic conceit of supposing children to be great conversationalists. We seem to have come

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far from the Oakeshott who elsewhere appealed to maturity, sophistication, experience in the ways of the world. And yet perhaps not as far as one might think.

Matthew Arnold's name may embolden us to a thought that verges on the presumptuous. It may suggest that Oakeshott's animus against Rationalism issues not only in a radical skepticism but also in something akin to philistinism. This is not a word to be used lightly of any thinker, least of all of one as civilized and learned as Oakeshott. Yet there is something unredeemably philistine in a "disposition" that resolutely refuses to be anything more than that, and cannot allow itself to embrace any idea, principle, or belief lest that imply a commitment to some truth.

Skepticism is innocent enough, even attractive, in an age suffering from a surfeit of principles and enjoying a plenitude of good habits. One can then rely happily enough on those habits without inquiring into their sources, their substance, or the reason for their perpetuation. But when those habits become insecure—or, worse, noxious—the conservative must look elsewhere for the civilized values he has learned to enjoy. Oakeshott is right to criticize the rationalists for subverting all habits, the good together with the bad. But so long as he provides us with no means for distinguishing between good and bad, let alone for cultivating a disposition to do good rather than bad, we are obliged to look elsewhere for guidance—to invoke mind, principle, belief, and whatever else is required to sustain civilization.

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Philosophical Investigations

FREDERICK MORGAN

I

In a five-minute stillness in September
the sunlight not yet departing from the goldenrod
that straggled down to shore's edge

it seemed all at once as if all might be understood—
if not articulately, at least in depth of heart—
by some less developed life-form,

some being that would move, eat, procreate and so on
but without the cutting edge of arrogance
that so disfigures our kind,

whose brain, pale instrument too fine for its data,
will, left to itself with nothing better to do,
multiply small distinctions

endlessly, uselessly in a tight compulsion
to impose its structure on the stuff of existence—
which indeed will bend itself

but only up to a certain unassayable point
beyond which, if the mind wander, it wanders untethered
from the glad solemn animal

holding to the heart of time, and holding in its own heart
as fulfilment of joy and pain (on days of September sun)
the certitude of being.

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II

Anger at my heart one April morning
and before St. Vincent Ferrer's the tulip-trees in bloom. . .

You wrestle with yourself as with an angel
who leaves you maimed and scarred. Let him prevail,
he'll weigh you down into nonentity,
but if you win, it's only for the day:
he's always back to try you out again.

I saw my fellow once, up in the sky
riding a cloud above the Chrysler Building
whose spire gleamed in gold—but what his face looks like
I haven't known, for always in our struggles
he keeps his head turned downward and away.

At the circus a few days ago a clown
fell from a high wire into the lions' cage
which—for publicity—served as a net.
The creatures roared, showed anger, but the tamer
held them at bay while the hurt clown rolled free.
He's in the hospital now, recovering;
soon will be fit to do his act again.

Admirable, to define yourself this way?
Yes, partly, for the courage and persistence.
But what's the final sense, if you know you yearn
to be at one with the prime animal
who'd clasp you to him in his raging love—
the six-winged beast all circleted with eyes?

You try to talk to God, to come to terms.
Not easy—particularly if that self

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you see as you, is grasped too definitely.
Too easy then to start the act all over,
God fading into a sort of wishfulness—
but let that sense of self blur a bit, grow vague,
you'll slip through these big temporary meshes

and find yourself. Where? In the world where all is known.
For suddenly the wrestlers disengage,
each seeing the angel in the other's eye—
the angel who, in each, is the same "I"—
and all is stilled within the sun's great blaze.

The passions then, released, ride the high winds
and God himself roars with them and rejoices.

✪ FREDERICK MORGAN's collection of poems, *A Book of Change*, a National Book Award nominee in 1973, was re-issued this spring by Scribner's in paperback. He has a second collection in preparation.

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Under the Crunch

Letter from England

RENEE WINEGARTEN

"I WISH SOMEONE WOULD TELL ME whether or not we are all in a frightful mess," pleaded a gentleman from Surrey in a letter to the *Times*. Where could he have been hiding? How had he failed to hear the apocalyptic prognostications of pundits and prophets? Soon it appeared that he had indeed heard them, but he had not actually *seen* any crisis, with its attendant human misery. What really perplexed him was the difference between the tales of woe heard and read almost daily and the evidence of his own eyes. For, he remarked, despite mounting prices and cries of imminent ruin, people are still driving their cars and choosing the most expensive cinema seats. The handsome stores, offering a vast selection of the entire world's goods, do not lack shoppers who, faithful to the old tradition of free trade, often demonstrate very little patriotism in their preference for the imported article. And not only shops, but theaters and restaurants, are crowded.

To a small degree, my own experience tends to confirm the gentleman's viewpoint. Last month, some friends from Washington arrived unexpectedly, and, owing to a crisis at the office, my husband neglected to reserve a table for dinner at a restaurant. After all, he thought, it was an early dinner hour—no real need to bother. With increasing embarrassment, we toured in vain the reputable eating houses of Chelsea and Kensington; and the Brompton Grill, which finally placed us, did not have empty tables for long.

So if I were to be asked whether life in England has been much

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changed by the present grave economic situation, I should have to reply, "Superficially, very little." What is going on under the surface in our green and pleasant land is another matter, far more controversial and difficult to assess—and not only for someone who leads a fairly retired, bookish life in a so-called middle-class suburb on the outskirts of London.

Our various ills are supposed to be chronic. They have been for as long as I can remember, and much longer, as a perusal of writers from Blake to Orwell can confirm. Still, I cannot help wondering today whether anybody stricken with even a minor ailment, whose pulse and temperature were being taken every hour on the hour, while doctors stood around the bed shaking their heads, would not succumb to despair before he died of disease. With modern nihilism, after the pursuit of happiness and the weary satiety that accompanies self-gratification, there follows what might be called the pursuit of unhappiness. Add to this a strain of melancholy in the English temperament which, especially on damp, gray days, wallows in self-deprecation and self-denigration.

Part masochism, part genuine modesty, part humorous social manner, part propitiation of the envious gods, such self-denigration is usually kept within bounds by an equally basic element of self-congratulation and by good sense—except in some intellectuals and imaginative writers. According to a certain kind of facile anarchist intellectual, the country is always governed by knaves and fools. Peter Barnes in his recent play, *The Bewitched,* proposed, as an image of contemporary Britain, the bigoted folly of late seventeenth-century imperial Spain in decline—in the person of a degenerate, impotent, idiot king. For John Osborne, the rhetorical reactionary, England resembled a broken-down music hall in the fifties, in *The Entertainer.* Now—in his latest play named after an old music-hall song, *The End of Me Old Cigar*—England has decayed still further into a bordello run by an upstart, subversive Jewess. I doubt very much, though, whether such writers and intellectuals, indignant patriots who transmute their own sense of impotence into that of the country, occupy as central a place in England today as did their counterparts in France and Germany

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in the twenties and thirties. Rather, insofar as they give expression to a current mood of self-laceration, they are birds of ill omen.

I am not alone in being deeply disturbed by the demoralizing flood of modish pessimism that flows from the press, the stage, radio, and television. In sound reaction, the Cumberland-born novelist Melvyn Bragg ventured to prophesy that parliamentary democracy would not break down in the immediate future; that hyperinflation on the Latin-American scale would not take place; nor would barbarians be destroying British culture tomorrow. But, came the mournful and farfetched riposte, parliamentary democracy has already collapsed, since important decisions are taken by the trade unions rather than by Parliament. With prices this year reputed to be 20 percent above those of last year (although experts differ widely about the accuracy of this figure), some insist that we are indeed on the brink of hyperinflation. Besides, the barbarians have already arrived, opines the educationist David Holbrook, whose King Charles's head is the debasement wrought by pornography in the arts and in society.

In short, a great gulf is fixed between, on the one hand, those who have faith in the fundamental health, resilience, and sanity of British institutions and in the good sense of the British people, and, on the other, those who believe that the British way of life is deeply fissured, in need of urgent treatment, or possibly beyond cure. The former probably make up the greater part of the country, including my friends among the farmers and their wives with whom I come into contact through my husband's work with the National Farmers' Union. The trouble is that neither party can prove its case to the satisfaction of the other, since both are generalizing from impressions based upon divergent temperaments and experience.

For my part, I imagine that few of the grim diagnosticians realize how immensely pleasurable it can be to give way to contempt and despair (which bolster the private sense of superior perspicacity), and how venerable is the rhetorical commonplace that elaborates upon the way everything is going to the dogs. Dazzled visitors to the splendid Turner bicentenary exhibition at the Royal Academy will find in the weighty catalogue how, as long ago as

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1812, that eccentric genius was, by analogy, foretelling Britain's decline at the very moment of her empire's consolidation. "Capua's joys beware!" cried Turner, sagely warning his countrymen against the demoralizing lure of soft living. This great romantic pessimist sweeps us into the vortex of his apocalyptic vision. In images of searing beauty he depicts inhumanity, disaster, and what he calls "The Fallacies of Hope." Much of Turner's work, with its sustained tension between loveliness and catastrophe, proves singularly appropriate to the ambience in Britain today.

That ambience is one of private bewilderment and nagging dismay. Never before, to my recollection, has the conversation at dinner parties turned so frequently upon the precarious state of the nation. "The worst industrial and financial crisis since the War," so we are told, happens almost every week. What can one do about it? Not apathy but anomie is the mood of the moment. Meanwhile people go about their affairs and their diversions. In the country, those who like such things continue to ride to hounds as keenly as do the characters of Trollope whenever he needs to set his plot moving. For myself, I note with pleasure that at least one minor dismal prophet has been confounded: the promised severe winter did not materialize. Daffodils took the winds of January, not March, with beauty. Thankful for mercies, I was able to bring unseasonal roses in profusion into the house, and delighted in the premature almond blossom etched against a spectacular Turneresque sunset. Thus one cultivates one's garden in the proper Voltairean manner, while wondering from time to time how much longer the pleasant quality of civilized life is going to last.

Has anyone the answer or the cure for problems that are said to be worldwide? And should one not be deeply suspicious of those who expect to find—or claim to have—some magic key? (The arrogant "lost leader," Sir Oswald Mosley, who at seventy-eight professes to know all the answers, is still waiting impatiently in the wings for the nation's call; while a more enigmatic—some think a more dangerous—figure, Enoch Powell, hovers darkly in the background).

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The question is not so much whether anyone has the stature and courage to insist upon painful and unpopular measures, which would require a decline in our living standards, but whether these measures will meet with general consent and will work. The tortured memory of the "Who rules Britain?" confrontation between the coal miners and the Conservative government in the winter of 1973–1974—a clash that resulted in the quite unnecessary gloom of a chilly, candle-lit, three-day working week—has not faded. Torn by conflicting emotions, by veering sympathy for the miners and the secret desire that the government in office should be respected, many of us soon realized that as long as the nation needed coal the government could not win. Perhaps this was our second Suez: if the first demonstrated the bankruptcy of an imperial gunboat policy in the fifties, the second revealed the hollowness of any Victorian-style attempt to put the workers in their place in the seventies.

Sometimes it seems as if the legacy bequeathed by Disraeli's "two nations" is being disputed a hundred and thirty years later. The Conservatives, who are often inclined to arrogate true patriotism to themselves, accuse the Labour government of pursuing the interests of one class, not those of the country as a whole; while Labour politicians, when in opposition, accuse the Conservative government of reinforcing the wealth and privilege of a few. The uncommitted feel a deep distaste for such polarization. Some utter a dangerous cry of "a plague on both your houses"; others yearn for a coalition or a form of united front which would, however, stifle genuine difference and essential democratic debate. Hence the talk of a return to the wartime mentality, meaning national unity against the enemy (inflation), austerity, self-discipline, and self-sacrifice. Such talk is popular with the not-so-young and especially with retired army officers.

The fact is that an immense change in manners has occurred since the days when Harold Macmillan informed us that we had never had it so good. Materialism has replaced plain living. What has become of all those people who thought central heating was unhealthy or bad for the character? Not so long ago, before the postwar advent of common travel abroad, eating was widely

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regarded as a necessity rather than a pleasure. The watery cabbage of our cuisine was once notorious. To have wine with one's meal was the prerogative of the upper-middle and upper class. To own goods purchased on credit was thought frivolous and disreputable. Even to mention money was a sign of baseness and vulgarity, a cant attitude still to be found occasionally among some old-fashioned members of the lesser gentry who do not lack filthy lucre. Nowadays pleasures and possessions are generally taken for granted; people have grown used to them and have more to lose. Those who long to return to austerity—"Capua's joys beware!"—not only associate it with our finest hour, but remember it as being "moral." Besides, austerity reminds them of their youth. It is the present-day young who are likely to be appalled by the idea of austerity. Never having known real shortages or rationing, the young can see no special virtue in them.

An attitude of limited desires has been supplanted by one of unlimited expectations. As Turner's advocate, Ruskin, was already reminding the manufacturers of Bradford over a hundred years ago, "Every demand you have created by novelty has fostered in the consumer a habit of discontent," thereby "confusing the manners of your country." In Ruskin's day, when in many cases the British workingman knew hard times—and exploitation by some odious Mr. Bounderby—he was often (though not always) noted for his considerable forbearance. Paradoxically, there exists today an atmosphere of mutual class envy, acrimony, and resentment in a society which, while it obviously has not eliminated every hardship, genuinely aims at greater fairness and opportunity for all.

Thus, the relatively well-to-do will solemnly inform you of idlers who prefer to live on relief rather than to work, or of families who enjoy subsidized housing yet own two cars and spend their holidays on the Costa Brava. Workers, when urged to show restraint in their demands, hasten to remind you of the former Lord Mayor of London and the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, who were among passengers able to afford what has been called the most expensive cruise of the century on the *Queen Elizabeth II*, well stocked with caviar and champagne. There is not much use in calling for

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the tightening of belts and for self-sacrifice when it is thought that this means the other fellow. And it is hard for people to take such calls seriously when they know that somebody else is "getting away with it."

The blatant irresponsibility of some privileged people at a time of crisis balances the irresponsibility of some extremists in the trade unions, and serves as a rationalization for increased wage demands to meet the higher cost of living. It remains to be seen whether the latest proposals for encouraging greater participation by the workers in decisions taken by their firms will succeed. Possibly the French-sounding "social contract" (actually a typically vague British contrivance for promoting social harmony and controlling wage demands, which was devised by the Trades Union Congress and accepted by the Labour government but not by the employers, who were never consulted) may ultimately have a more salutary effect than any statutory prices-and-incomes policy. So far, however, wage demands sometimes seem to be pressed with little care for that untranslatable English word, "compromise," and without any regard to their logical consequence—that is, the demise of the goose that lays the golden eggs.

A tragicomedy is repeatedly played for the benefit of the public—a drama in which the "anger," "frustration," and "desperation" of the workers can no longer be contained and the "reluctant" adoption of militant strike action is advocated as the sole effective weapon for obtaining the desired end. The new cant phrase is that desperate men must necessarily employ desperate methods: a phrase that involves the devaluation of despair. Men imprisoned on some Gulag archipelago, or who see their infants starving to death on the streets of Calcutta, may well be desperate. Those who still have their freedom, enough to eat, a car or a color television set, can scarcely be called so, although they may or may not have a genuine grievance. More people who do have some grievance—who believe that others are being treated better than themselves and who fear being left behind—appear to feel that it is only by threats, blackmail, postures of militancy, and general bloody-mindedness that they can get what they want and deserve. And this seems to me to introduce a new, aggressive, and poten-

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tially dangerous element into a society that has long been famed for its respect for law.

The cause of some strikes remains obscure. I think particularly of the one that occurred at the English National Opera, when stagehands walked out during a performance of Hans Werner Henze's *The Bassarids* conducted by the composer—not because they disliked the music, I hasten to add. The production of this impressive work, based on a libretto by Auden and Kallman—after *The Bacchae* of Euripides, with its highly ambiguous and disturbing (if painfully apt) emphasis upon the penalty of trying to suppress irrational forces—was a considerable achievement for the rising and talented company at the Coliseum. During the strike the theater remained closed for six weeks, with consequent loss of revenue and hard-won good will. Ultimately, self-inflicted wounds of this type, and paralleled elsewhere, cannot but debilitate a society that has hitherto seemed powerless to prevent them.

A colleague who was living in Seville just before the Spanish Civil War once told me that it was the endless succession of strikes that fostered the backlash of the bourgeoisie. Here in England, a Middle Class Association has been formed, led by John Gorst, member of Parliament for Barnet, Hendon North, the constituency in which I live. The very name of such an association has an unfortunate ring.

Clearly, many members of the middle class (once defined as consisting of all those who think they belong to it) are worried about the Labour government's punitive taxation policy and about their dwindling savings. They are much concerned, too, about the quality of schooling available to their children now that the controversial and variable comprehensive school is replacing the proven grammar school. They fear a decline in academic and character-forming standards, a relaxation of discipline, a leveling-down instead of a leveling-up. It is they who, in their turn, lay claim to being "angry" and "frustrated." England in 1975, with its firm democratic institutions, its disinterested civil service, its apolitical army, its vigilant press, its insular tradition of independence, is not Spain in 1936 (nor is it Weimar in 1932). Nevertheless this as yet inchoate movement of the middle class

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represents another disturbing symptom of what Carl J. Friedrich would have called "totalitarian trends"—that is, features that may exist in free, democratic societies and that may lead to some form of totalitarianism "if conditions become 'ripe.' "

Among these features may be counted also a nostalgia for "leadership," which at times means nothing more than the yearning for a Churchillian voice to stiffen morale, and at others betrays the desire for a British replica of the authoritarian grandeur complex of General de Gaulle. Some have urged a government of businessmen instead of politicians, thus misconstruing the nature of our society which, rooted in choice, cannot dispense with the very politicians who embody that choice. One well-known lady, old enough to know better, could even be heard calling for a dictatorship.

But these are occasional, faint, eccentric echoes, which suffice to induce an unpleasant *frisson* in people endowed with long memories. True, widespread unemployment together with endless inflation might provide a pretext for extremists of Right or Left, as well as the essential precondition for real discontent and political unrest; but luckily, so far, this disaster has not occurred. What we have is, rather, a show of discontent in order to preserve standards and privileges or to obtain further benefits; and, in some quarters, misgivings about what the future may bring if something does not turn up soon. I suspect, though, that most of us are like Mr. Micawber and anticipate that, somehow, something will turn up.

Meanwhile inflation is troubling everybody (although many of our prices are still lower than those on the Continent). At first it was common to hear shoppers, brought up on imperial preference and cheap food from the Commonwealth, mutter "Wicked!" or "Preposterous!" at the sight of some price ticket. But now everyone simply expects prices will rise by the next time they require an article or a service, and their expectations are often fulfilled. As an example: in five years my annual subscription to the London Library has gone up from fourteen to twenty-five pounds, or half of what life membership would have been if I had had the sense (or the wherewithal) to take it up when I was an undergraduate.

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All the same, perhaps I should add that I do not begrudge the increase to Carlyle's invaluable institution, which often enables me to avoid the wearisome delays at the British Museum, and I only wish that increased subscriptions might help to rescue the London Library from its precarious position—which I know they won't. The trouble is that one can see no end to inflation. How long will salaried or free-lance individuals be able to go on supporting numerous artistic enterprises—the unsubsidized Glyndebourne Festival Opera, for instance, whose prices have risen again this year? And what will eventually be the culminating effect upon cultural projects that at present are among our national glories?

Even the opera houses and theaters that do receive a subsidy from the Arts Council are severely hit by rising costs of production and maintenance. Some do not possess enough reserves to cope with emergencies. The Royal Court Theatre, for instance, has a leak in the roof and is having to organize a series of concerts to pay for the repair. The National Theatre, when it finally moves from the Old Vic to its new home by the Thames—an edifice enthusiastically qualified as "an actor's dream" by an acquaintance in the company—is unlikely to have an easy time as running costs mount higher. Economies are already having to be made by the Royal Shakespeare Company: A friend of mine, professor of English literature at a foreign university, attended a conference of leading Shakespeare scholars in Stratford-on-Avon last summer. She complained privately to me about the very limited fare provided by the Royal Shakespeare Company—a single production of *Measure for Measure*—during the week she was there, in comparison with the varied riches that used to be available. When one has seen better days, it is extremely distasteful to have to cut one's coat according to one's cloth—and in the cultural sphere the loss will not be ours alone.

Still, at the moment, the economic crisis has most seriously affected those individuals who are living on their savings and on fixed incomes: widows, old-age pensioners, and the retired, who see their earlier calculations being proved false. I know at least one person who retired at fifty-eight but who has now had to return to work. Some, thoughtless grasshoppers who see how the savings of

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others have declined, decide to live for today. Others, wishing to emulate the more prudent ant, invest in consumer durables, in antiques, in works of art, or indeed in anything that they imagine may be more solid than money or equities. The more pathetic ones try to mend the hole in the bucket temporarily by stocking their freezers with food.

As so often happens when things are difficult, people turn to the past. Books and television films on wartime heroism and the stiff upper lip (which have come to bore our neighbors to death) do still exist, but they are not so popular. Instead, it is the Victorian age of middle-class upholstered comfort and solid values that dominates the imagination, and now replaces the eighteenth-century aristocratic ideal of wit and elegance, once the mark of the truly discriminating. William Morris's stylized flowers and foliage have banished Regency stripes. Not skepticism but order; not debauchery but decent family life; not self-indulgence but service and duty—these are the secret dreams of a supposedly liberated and permissive society.

Bearded young men and long-haired, long-skirted, and becloaked girls look almost as if they have stepped out of the paintings by Millais and Rossetti that once adorned my primary school, and that not so long ago were regarded as a bit of a joke. One may discover a hint of fashionable camp in some aspects of the current vogue for Victoriana—for gewgaws, knickknacks, heavy curvaceous furniture, formerly known as "junk" but now elevated to the rank of "antiques." One may also note a genuine longing for prettiness, for craftsmanship, for character. Simon Raven's free adaptation of Trollope's Palliser novels for television may have been panned by the critics as worthy but dull, yet it satisfied this taste, and many viewers were sufficiently stimulated by it to be found avidly reading the six volumes of the original on summer beaches.

Of course, there is something false about this Victorian nostalgia as there is about all nostalgia (although I think ours is fairly harmless in comparison with "la mode rétro," the current vogue for the Nazi Occupation period in France). Certainly the general public is not concerned with Victorian poverty and dis-

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ease; it is not reading Engels on the working class, Carlyle and Ruskin on the dire moral consequences of the Industrial Revolution; nor is it much bothered by the snobbery and hypocrisy against which Bernard Shaw and Lytton Strachey turned the weapon of their wit. The public is escaping into a dream world, just as the Victorians themselves often liked to escape from contemporary industrial horrors into a dream world of medieval chivalry whence serfdom had been banished.

One very revealing difference, though, is the present scarcity of crusading literature, which was so outstanding a feature of the Victorian era (and which, indeed, lasted until World War II). A generation has grown up that knows dire poverty and hunger marches only by hearsay. In the main, ours is a society that cares about the underprivileged. All parties lay claim to "concern," and the welfare of the old-age pensioners has almost become a counter to be used to give proof of good faith in this regard. The state, which is living on borrowed money and has mortgaged many of its assets, is expected to come to the financial rescue whenever anything goes wrong or is lacking; and some of us are only just beginning to realize that the state means ourselves. The state may bail out some struggling industry or social service. But in the end who is going to bail out Britain?

Our sense of malaise derives largely from uncertainty about the future—whether the things we love will endure, whether there will be more unemployment and increasing inflation, indeed whether such ills may not finally undermine our mostly gentle, polite, and kindly way of life and our hard-won freedom under law. The debate leading up to the referendum on whether Britain should remain in the European Economic Community ought to clarify the possibilities open to us. For this debate, political and economic in appearance, masks a more profound controversy as to where Britain's true destiny lies: whether with practical expediency or island sentiment. The debate is no longer about the price of butter, as it was in the sixties. Instead it turns upon such powerful and emotionally charged topics as national sovereignty and independence, or our likely fate should we decide to move outside the European Economic Community. It concerns where we can

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best hope to make our voice heard or how we may still be able to contribute to the well-being of the less fortunate. Whatever the choice, risk and change cannot be eluded. One important thing, surely, is that this debate is being freely conducted in a civilized way.

Unlike some peoples, the British do not really want to be involved in a mighty and exciting drama: they accept drama (when they have to do so) as a means of allowing them to demonstrate their self-possession. Thus, we are still muddling through—or, rather, trying to hang on without losing our nerve—until 1980, when supplies of North Sea oil supposedly will restore our fortunes.

Meanwhile the old order is changing. The power of the middle class is doubtless fading as that of the old aristocracy faded. Will the workers who improve their position continue to preserve a class mentality and to display a lack of social responsibility? Or will an era marked by their increasing involvement (an era that may well be approaching) eventually bring about a more broadly based society, a less class-ridden democracy, the One Nation of Disraeli's dream, if not of his method?

As we move slowly and painfully toward that goal, present ideals and standards will inevitably be modified, and we shall naturally tend to notice what has deteriorated for some and to overlook what has improved for others. I have been much concerned here with the fear of what fear itself may do to weaken and discredit democracy. Nonetheless I also remember that Byron once cried, "Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying. . . ." Freedom's banner is always being torn: I believe there are still enough sensible people in all walks of life throughout Britain to see that our enviable liberties and decencies are handed on, a little frayed here and there, perhaps, but more or less intact.

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On a Winged Talisman, Roman, Bronze, That I Gave My Friend, A Token To Be Hung on His Key Chain

(For William Brice)

Jascha Kessler

Asleep, curled in your pocket,
he waits, his wings quivering,
and with his two old friends dreams
of those moist, those blue mornings
before these shrinking, white days
that crack our chilled hearts like glass
came to tell us of winter

Do you remember those breasts?
How straight she walked, eyes opened,
her long arms held out, her hands
strong and tapered, cupped flowers,
offering you her friendship,
like the touch of love's kindness
her smiling lips showed she knew?

Out of an early hour,
with a flecking of salt spume
you could taste on her shoulders
and her hair heavy with youth,
faint stars caught in its coiled ropes,
she had come to greet you, yes,
so that you would see, and know

And you woke, as though the sun
were waking too, round and warm,

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and growing from her belly
as she stood there in silence,
waiting till you rose, and stood,
till you let your locked thoughts go
and welcomed her against you

Again! Again and again!
Dont you remember her breasts?
that bright sky that shone on you
as the garden turned drifting
amongst those mountain orchards
and the sun pressed sweating down
on their swollen, dripping fruit?

And then she laughed, how she laughed!
her smooth limbs flung blazing wide
then wound round you tightening
as you thrashed in terror, trapped—
all that day long you struggled,
a beast, child, man—a young god
crying and singing and wild

as the hot red dusk crumbled
and fell in ashes on you
where you sprawled between wrecked walls
your bones burning themselves out
your mind staring at that sky,
cold, blind, black and high, so high. . .
Dont you remember her, now?

● JASCHA KESSLER, professor of English at UCLA, is author of *An Egyptian Bondage & Other Stories* and several books of poetry; the most recent is *In Memory of the Future*, in which the above poem appears. His plays have been produced in New York and Los Angeles. A play, *Free Fire Zone*, and a novel, *Rapid Transit*, are newly completed.

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Science and Ethics

From *The Nature of Scientific Discovery*

Can science provide the foundation for ethics? Are there ethical limits to scientific discoveries? These were but two of the provocative questions raised as scientists, historians, theologians, and philosophers gathered in three collegial groups in Washington, D.C., in April of 1973. The collegia were relatively intimate working discussions held in parallel with a public symposium presented by the Smithsonian Institution and the National Academy of Sciences in observance of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicolaus Copernicus.

This discussion concludes a collegium on science, philosophy, and religion in historical perspective, organized by Walter Shropshire, Jr.; it appears with collected addresses and the other collegial sessions in The Nature of Scientific Discovery, *published by the Smithsonian Institution Press under the editorship of Owen Gingerich, professor of astronomy and history of science at Harvard University and astrophysicist at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory. The following, though edited and abbreviated from the stenographic transcripts, accurately conveys the flavor of the original conversations.*

DANIEL J. CALLAHAN:* Let us start with the premise that man is indeed the center of the universe, if only because we don't know that there are any other beings anywhere. If we then ask, what is the nature of this man, I would come back to the very traditional notion that man is essentially a rational animal; the greatest thing about man is his rationality.

I would argue that if the characteristic mark of man is his reason, the whole problem of relationships between the observer and the observed, man's participation in what he knows, ought to

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be seen as man's increasing need genuinely to understand the world "out there." In a very strong sense the world is more than the human community, and, most important, in some sense or other there is genuinely something out there apart from man.

I think one of the bad historical effects of the Copernican Revolution in displacing man from the center of the universe was to make him a much more parochial kind of being—one who began increasingly to see the purpose of science as primarily knowledge for the sake of power and control. It is almost to say that since we are not at the center of the universe, the goal now is no longer to understand the heavens, but to understand how we can manipulate this small part of the universe we occupy. The rise of the social sciences then made man more parochial still, particularly when they tried to understand human social reactions in terms of control of human beings. It is almost as if the only important reality to man is the human community.

I would hope that religion in the future would move beyond that. The key task for man is not only to understand his place in the universe, but even more to understand what indeed the universe is. One disastrous thing that has happened, I believe, in theology in general, and in the churches specifically, is that the churches have been turned into a kind of therapeutic community, where the main drive has been to enable people to grapple with themselves, their own consciences, their social, political, and psychological problems. The older notion of theology is really to understand the first and last things, to get some hold of final truth, of which the problems of the human community are only a part.

I feel very reactionary in this. I think that, as important as it is to understand the relationship between the observer and the observed, or between the human community and physical nature out there, the really important point still is that there is something quite separate from us. I am struck by the fact that there is, indeed, a very sharp division between subject and object. There is no possibility of manipulating the whole physical universe. The most we can do is to try to grasp what this universe means, quite apart from whether we can control it or not.

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Now right away that is a kind of shock to those human beings who have become used to thinking of knowledge as power and manipulation. But I also suspect that the breaking down of the subject/object relationship has made it very difficult for us finally to get a good grasp on what man is.

This brings me to the major point I want to make: If there is one crucial problem in the relationship between science and theology in the future, it is going to be the problem of ethics. What is the good life for man? I think the basic choice facing us is whether ethics is a kind of an *ex nihilo* creation by human beings simply for the sake of survival, where human beings have to develop moral codes and guidelines to enable them to survive together; or whether, indeed, if there is a nature out there, that nature finally provides some guides for the creation of guidelines, and whether there is something in which to root an ethic other than survival needs.

I suspect that we may be forced to a much older, classical medieval notion that there is, indeed, a nature, that man is a part of that nature, and that nature is teleological in some very fundamental sense. The problem, then, for man is to come to understand his own nature, and that problem becomes one of trying to get an insight into nature as it really is. I think a worthwhile line of pursuit might be to see if, indeed, in that nature out there we can get some guidelines on the creation of ethical structures.

BERNARD DAVIS:* Could you expand on this notion of possibly finding sources of ethics out there? Where out there?

CALLAHAN: By an attempt to understand philosophically, first of all, the nature of matter. Second, and more narrowly and parochially, understanding the philosophical implications of evolution. To what extent, for example, has evolution driven man in some direction that then begins to entail certain kinds of ethical values?

The "out there" is—put in broadest terms—that there exists more than consciousness, and that our consciousness works on

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something other than consciousness. When Professor John A. Wheeler tells us about the black hole, this tells us something about the nature of the universe. The important thing is somehow to see, even in the development of an ethical system, how one can take that kind of thing into account. All I am doing is laying out a research program; I am not answering your question.

DAVIS: You did answer it in part by suggesting that a deeper knowledge of evolution would help guide us in developing a system. Certainly I agree with you. But I am not sure that that would be so distinct from an alternative that would say that our ethical system is there because it has survival value.

CALLAHAN: I would want to build an understanding of evolution into a larger understanding of the nature of the universe. If you just start from evolution, you may not have been starting back quite far enough. A question is, why is there evolution rather than nonevolution? A common fault is starting too late in the game conceptually.

EULALIO R. BALTAZAR:* Dr. Davis, might not your view of instinct as the basis of morality within an evolutionary framework be the same as what Dr. Callahan is talking about philosophically in terms of the concept of nature?

DAVIS: It would if the aspects of nature that you were now taking into account were biological aspects—specifically, evolution. But I find it a little hard to see how the nature of the physical universe can really serve as a source of help in developing a better system of ethics beyond creating, shall we say, the humility of realizing how small a role we play. Isn't this one of the dangers in the world today—that the smaller man is made to feel, the harder it is to have him take seriously the kind of ideals that underlie ethical systems?

CALLAHAN: When I listened to Professor Wheeler discuss black holes, I heard hints that, in some sense or other, the universe is not crazy. There is a drive and a direction, a kind of order in the universe. If this is the case, our problem is to see if we can really dis-

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cern this order; in some sense then we are part of this order, and that begins to give some positive foundation for an ethic.

It is better to survive than not to survive; everybody would agree on that. But if you say, survival for what? that gets to be a hard question, and at that point you are involved in questions that go beyond evolution.

DAVIS: Darwin talks about survival of the species, and that's very different from survival of the individual. Survival of a social species involves patterns of activity very different from those that are concerned with just the survival of the individual. Today we are starting to think of protection of the environment as a moral obligation. This is intimately linked with feelings about wanting our children and our children's children to have a world to live in that is worthwhile. There are deep biological roots for this kind of thing.

CALLAHAN: What I find interesting about the whole environmental discussion, at least in terms of ethics, is that so much of Western ethics has been highly individualistic; even when one talks about social good, this really translates into the good of individuals. But when you begin talking about species survival, and if you begin thinking of future generations, you have to bring in some notions of human good that are in some way transcendent.

DAVIS: Modern molecular biology has provided extraordinarily direct evidence for evolution, in the form of increasing differences in DNA sequences paralleling increasing differences in bodily form and function. This development has removed any vestige of doubt that Darwinian theory was essentially correct. Given that, how do you react to the proposition that perhaps the most valuable approach for students of ethics today would be to explore as deeply as possible the implications of evolution? Many of the earlier interpretations have been very shallow.

CALLAHAN: I would quite agree. But I guess you still have the problem of exploring what is the context of evolution, or for what end. I find that it is very difficult to get clear answers as to why the species ought to go on. Who could care if ten thousand years from now there were no human species left? Would it make any basic

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differences? I think there is no decent answer to that question unless one has a larger theory of the nature of reality. Why is it good that there is a flower?

WILLIAM POLLARD:* There is a sense in the total picture from the emergence of a universe out of a black hole and the emergence of laws. First it was just hydrogen, and that wasn't a very exciting universe. So you have to cycle it through stars, supernovas, to get carbon and nitrogen and oxygen, in order to achieve. Now man is certainly an achievement. It is just fantastically extraordinary—you start out with an information code and in four billion years it elaborates itself to man. Man is a product of this tremendous history, and that itself constitutes a kind of obligation to be man.

MICHAEL HAMILTON:* Let us consider Christianity for a moment. Does that give you any guidance as to what your responsibility to your grandchildren is?

CALLAHAN: A minimal obligation might be that there should be grandchildren.

HAMILTON: Why?

CALLAHAN: Simply because, following Dr. Pollard's thought, it is somehow part of the overall achievement of the universe that there be man, and one has an obligation to keep this achievement going. I think the only way of finally answering this kind of question is to see man as an intrinsic good in the universe. In a curious sense, one could say that, without man, the universe would be worse off, though you can't say that human beings would, by virtue of not existing, be worse off.

DAVIS: I would like to come back to the question of why man should try to survive and offer a simpler explanation. Professor Werner Heisenberg has said that, with respect to morality and social behavior, there are certain things we should simply accept as givens and not question because he could not conceive of a society functioning without certain moral rules. I suspect that his having lived through the degradation of Nazism in Germany must have

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given him strong feelings about what happens when you start questioning moral values. Similarly, I would take our instinct for survival as a given. We would not be here unless evolution had provided us with genes that ensured that instinct, and it would seem unnatural to deny or try to suppress it—no matter how depressed we may be about the present state of our cultural evolution, and regardless of whether or not we can prove that our existence is "good." We may, indeed, be programming ourselves for extinction, inadvertently; but it would be unnatural to do so deliberately.

If we have this deep-seated instinct to survive, it seems to me that the problem of morality is trying to persuade people that unless you behave in such and such a way toward your neighbors or toward the environment, your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have a lot tougher time surviving. That could be one foundation stone for an ethic.

CALLAHAN: It seems to me that one very unique trait of human beings is that they frequently put other values higher than the value of survival. The *quality* of the survival can become as important as the sheer fact of survival. I think that you cannot build an ethic just on survival, but you must have some decent sense of what other values are to be integrated with survival.

DAVIS: I agree completely. Evolution is far from a complete basis for an ethical system, but to the extent that it is relevant, isn't there room for a great deal of exploration of what we mean by survival? When the heroes of Masada were on a plateau attacked by the Romans, the last ones finally committed suicide and left a moving message that they would rather die than be slaves under the Romans. They didn't survive, but their message encouraged the survival of other members. It is the survival of the species, ultimately, and not the survival of individuals, that counts in evolution.

POLLARD: Evolution teaches ambiguous lessons. The vast majority of the species haven't survived. A few have survived a phenomenally long time, like the cockroach—three hundred million years.

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WILLIAM J. THOMPSON:* If survival is a value, how does one choose among various strategies of survival—between the natural survival of the fittest and the cultural fitting of the survivors in terms of genetic engineering?

DAVIS: It is very complicated. We are now in a position in which no other species ever was before: We are beginning to understand our own mechanism of inheritance, and to be aware of the biological as well as the environmental factors that influence our survival. We are the first species that has the possibility of deliberately influencing selection within it. It's a very dangerous power, and it scares us all. But sooner or later our species is going to start to look at the question of some kind of deliberate selection; and I suspect the need to limit the total population may bring the problem to a head sooner than we think.

In fact, we are in a rather curious situation. Throughout evolution species have evolved most rapidly under conditions where their environments have changed most severely. In the last few centuries, man has developed the power to change his environment more rapidly than the environment of any species has changed before. But at the same time, modern developments in medicine, and our ethical patterns, lead us to promote the survival of all individuals, as far as possible. I am not questioning this; I am just describing the very curious paradox that we face.

CALLAHAN: Then we have to project a really gloomy view for this evolutionary process. What you are saying is that we have the possibility of intervening in the process, but with no clear notion of what is indeed good. You have to have a large theory of the universe to say survival is good. We could make a radical case to say that everybody alive today will simply have no more children—we will just live a riotous life of enjoyment, use up everything and then all die—but we would all somehow feel that is wrong in some deep sense.

DAVIS: That's because we have an instinct for survival of the species, so it does feel wrong. But in addition, having the technical

* WILLIAM J. THOMPSON, professor of humanities at York University, Toronto, was chairman of this discussion.

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possibility of intervening consciously in our evolution does not mean that we have to do so. As long as we have no clear consensus on what is good it would seem prudent not to intervene. And, in fact, eugenics is hardly a live issue today, except for the prevention of well-defined hereditary diseases.

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ROGER SHINN:* I am primarily a student of social ethics, but one greatly interested in scientific discovery, and so I would like to look at a rather specific question with a long history: Are there ethical limits that can be imposed on scientific research and discovery?

To ask the question may open a lot of old wounds, because there is a horrendous history in which religious groups have inhibited or even suppressed scientific discovery in ways we here would all disown. We tend to identify ourselves as the lovers of truth, opposed to the censors and tyrants. All of us here have a deep commitment to freedom of inquiry and the encouragement of search for truths. As I look at this, I see that this commitment in itself has an ethical and a religious quality.

I recall a conversation a few years back on this subject with Isidor Rabi, a famous Nobel laureate in physics. He put it this way: "Science simply operates on the faith that knowledge is good and that ignorance is something to be overcome." He went on to say: "You can't really vindicate this faith empirically. It is a faith." And Rabi related it to the first chapter of the Bible, "Let there be light." Sharing that faith, he advocated an unquenchable desire for knowledge and the search for it.

To a very great extent, I want to identify myself with that. What has caused me to rethink it lately is a number of questions that have come out of the scientific community. I'll start with Marshall Nirenberg, another Nobel laureate, distinguished for his achievements in deciphering the genetic code. Nirenberg made the statement, "When man becomes capable of constructing his own cells, he must refrain from doing so until he has sufficient wisdom

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to use this knowledge for the benefit of mankind." Here he is suggesting a restraint, not on inquiry, but on the uses of what comes out of inquiry, on action. I suppose everyone would endorse some restraints along that line.

But more remarkable, a quite different proposal comes from, of all people, Herman Kahn, who has said, "We may well need an index of forbidden knowledge." The phraseology comes from the old Vatican practice, an Index of Forbidden Books. These amazing words are in an interview in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 20, 1971. Kahn gives as an example knowledge of genetic engineering. He further points out that we have established, in effect, a kind of index of forbidden knowledge in the nuclear area, where we know certain things that we don't share even with our allies.

Kahn argues: "Whatever the intellectual dangers of an index, they pale in comparison with the danger of not having one. A society that hasn't the moral capacity to absorb new knowledge without putting itself in moral peril has to have restraints imposed upon it." This came from a source that I hadn't quite expected, but it gives me the courage to conjecture about it, not to endorse it.

Another thing that has happened recently, among a very small part of the scientific community, has been the deliberate withdrawal from research, because some scientists have thought that society was not capable of handling dangerous new knowledge. Catherine Roberts, the microbiologist, did that. She came to the point where she said: "This kind of inquiry not only unlooses dangerous knowledge, but it is in its very nature so dehumanizing that I want no more to do with it."

Bernard Davis and I were present when James Shapiro declared his intention of renouncing his scientific career, at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston in 1969. He had been part of the Harvard team that isolated a gene, and he chucked it all, at least temporarily. His particular language, which I wrote down on the occasion, indicates that so long as men like Nixon and Agnew prescribe what is going to be done with scientific knowledge, we scientists should quit giving them the materials for their bad decisions.

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I do not at all agree with Shapiro's reasoning on that occasion. I have checked this idea out with a number of scientists, including some survivors of the Nazi holocaust; and some of them said that, while they do not agree with Shapiro, they would agree that there are social situations in which they would refuse to do research, because they would feel the society would so inevitably misuse it. This is not saying the knowledge is evil. It is saying that it is better not to have the knowledge than to be almost certain it will be used for evil purposes.

It is against that background that I want to advance five possible answers to the question: "Are there ethical limits on scientific research and discovery?"

The first possible answer is no, there are not. There should be no restraints; censorship and suppression are inherently harmful, and freedom of inquiry, the active promotion of inquiry, should go right ahead. I'd say that 95 percent of me vibrates with that. The pernicious examples on the other side make me quite sympathetic to unfettered inquiry. But then I have some questions.

Answer two, which I hear from a number of friends in the scientific community, is to distinguish between basic research and applied research; to put no moral limits on basic research, but some definite moral limits on applied research. The most convincing example that they usually come up with is germ warfare. They would, for moral reasons, not participate in applied research aimed at bacteriological warfare. But this would mean no inhibition of basic research.

The problem I find with this is that I, as a nonscientist, don't know how to draw the line between basic research and applied research, and when I press scientists on it, I find that often they don't either. You can easily figure some examples that are one category or the other, but what about the borderline?

When I pushed one scientist, who has done a lot of government work, on this issue, he estimated that three-quarters of what went on at Fort Detrick, for the sake of research on bacteriological warfare, was indistinguishable from what is going on at the National Institutes of Health. There was one-quarter of it that you

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can say clearly belonged to the Fort, rather than the Institutes of Health, but three-quarters was quite comparable. Right now there are widespread accusations of cheating on bacteriological warfare, because, in the name of learning how to prevent disease, you can be concocting schemes for spreading disease.

Granted all these difficulties, I would still be inclined to think, as an ethicist, that there is some value in the distinction between basic and applied research, with some moral restraints needed on the latter. At the very least the distinction may heighten consciousness of the moral issues, and it may have some practical consequences.

The third possible answer: Even on basic research there should be some limitations. We can pretty quickly think of some we would probably all agree on. Some kinds of basic research that would produce intellectually interesting and maybe practically desirable knowledge are too cruel to people or infringe on human dignity. Anybody can think up experiments to find out what the human tolerance of pain is, but there would be some moral inhibition in practicing this on a group of specimens.

Or take some ethical restraints that don't involve physical pain. Everybody I know who is interested in the relation between biology and culture has a kind of lurking desire to run off a big-scale controlled experiment on identical twins: to separate some identical twins at birth, to keep others together, and to compare the results. Now we piece together little fragments of information from accidental sources, but you could run a controlled experiment here and learn a lot from it. So far we have never attempted this kind of infringement on human dignity: to separate identical twins for purposes of gaining knowledge that would be scientifically useful but morally intolerable. Thus human dignity imposes some limitations on research. This is not because the knowledge desired would be bad or evil. It is simply not worth the human and ethical cost of the experiment.

Now a fourth question, certainly related to the third, concerns risks—that is, some kinds of research require risks that might not hurt human dignity or inflict cruelty, but they might. We are al-

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ways weighing this matter of risk, because there is no such thing as a risk-free life, but there are some risks that are immoral to apply to people. The atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons has not been renounced by all nations, but a good many have renounced it because of the risks connected with it.

The area of risk can become a moral consideration. In the area of medical experimentation, this gets quite complicated at some points. The general rule, of course, on medical experimentation is to require informed consent of the subject. But then there are all these cases where the subject can't give informed consent—infants, for example. At the moment I am in discussion with the National Institutes of Health, trying to shape a policy here. Take one case we are working on now, fetal experimentation. Suppose, following an abortion, the fetus is alive. The doctors make their best estimate that this life cannot be preserved. Maybe it will persist for ten or fifteen minutes. Can we run an interesting experiment here? Any inflicting of pain is probably quite minimal. Is this an infringement on human dignity?

Or let's take another one. A woman has determined to have an abortion. It is to her benefit to postpone it through the risky period. How about running an experiment on this fetus in her body to see how it will react to certain medical treatments? How about something with a risk potential of thalidomide, in which you are not going to hurt a human being who is going to have a life ahead of him, because this abortion is going to take place anyhow? There is, among medical people, lawyers, and ethicists who have discussed this case, a great reluctance to do the experiment. Is this connected with instinct? Is it connected with an irrational squeamishness? Is it connected with some sense that life is sacred and that even if the fetus is not going to come to full humanity, you don't play around with it just for the sake of knowledge? I have great difficulty, not in knowing what my initial feelings are, but in trying to ground those in a judgment that I would want to stand by and defend. Yet I am sure that concern for human dignity puts some limits on research.

Now my fifth and final point is a simpler one. It has to do with

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priorities. Most of the time we are not deciding, shall we do this research or shall we outlaw it? We are deciding, shall we finance it? Here there are great issues of priorities. These are partly chosen just for scientific reasons; some things are worth financing because they have much more possibility of ending in discovery than others. But some choices have to do with a whole set of cultural values and attitudes. Shall we put a lot of money into research on heart transplants, which probably by their nature can help only a small number of people? Or shall we put the money into other things?

The issue is not prohibitions, but public policy. It simply reminds us that every decision to undertake research, at least expensive research, involves assigning some of the resources of the society, and here our valuations enter in. These valuations are not solely scientific, but are cultural as well, and they may come out of sheer prejudices or out of deep convictions.

I have suggested five possible answers, and I have suggested my attitudes on each. I cannot come to any one conclusion, except that the old question that I had once put on the shelf as solved—there should be no ethical, moral, or religious restraints on research—needs some rethinking. The old clichés, here as elsewhere, have to be reviewed once again.

H. VASHEN APOSHIAN:* You haven't brought in the risk-benefit calculation. Today everyone is concerned about experimentation on the human fetus. If this were ten, fifteen years ago, when, if it were certain that there was a good chance that polio could be treated and cured by means of experimenting with fetuses, it would have been an entirely different ball game.

SHINN: If I'm betting on a state lottery, the risk-benefit calculus is a very clear one. I know just what it is. The minute you intrude a consideration like human dignity or the sanctity of life, you greatly change your risk-benefit calculus.

A scientist might subject fruit flies to radiation to increase the mutation rate, partly just for what he'd learn, or partly on the as-

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sumption that 999 mutations will be worse, and one will be a gain. You don't feel immoral about this. But you are not going to do this with human beings. You have a very different risk-benefit calculus, in particular when it's done without consent. Everybody who thinks about this issue now has that horrendous Tuskegee syphilis experiment somewhere in the back of his mind. In the social context, the risk-benefit calculus is always applied to those who aren't in the position to protect themselves. This business of human dignity or the sacredness of life just upsets what would apply in other cases.

APOSHIAN: But where the dignity comes in is very difficult to see when it's applied to a fetus that is going to live 15 minutes.

CALLAHAN: Part of the controversy is that they can be kept alive longer for the sake of the experiment, too. That complicates it.

DAVIS: I am worried that the strength of our reactions to sins of commission, in the testing of drugs and other new therapeutic devices, may bring to a standstill further advances in therapy. No new drug has ever been produced that hasn't involved risk for the first people, and a great many drugs have been dropped after a great many people were harmed. But we wouldn't have medicine without somebody assuming those risks. As horrified as I am by the Tuskegee incident and as unhappy as I am about orphans in asylums, I am also worried about a society that might stop medical progress.

HAMILTON: Suppose you calculate a serious risk and decide that you would not wish to undertake those kinds of experiments. But let's say that down in South America they were not prohibited and then suppose that the information became of some use to the understanding of the gestation process—would you advocate our using this information gained elsewhere?

SHINN: When the information is found and is useful, you use it.

HAMILTON: Is it as clear as that? I have a hunch the more you get into this question, the more you'd find it to be a difficult one.

APOSHIAN: This has always bothered me. For many years, and even today, most of the drugs that are developed by American pharmaceutical companies are first tested out on humans outside

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of this country, in the underdeveloped countries.

I know of a case about four years ago where a birth control pill by one of the most eminent pharmaceutical companies in our country was almost ready to go on the market, and was finally taken off the market because the Mexican women who had been given the birth control pills had ended up with bladder cancers.

SHINN: I was not saying I would endorse doing this in South America in order to get the knowledge. But it is like admiring an ancient Greek object of art that was produced by slaves; we don't approve of slavery and you wouldn't repeat this thing, but it is beautiful.

HAMILTON: Let me come back at you, because the problem is that once you begin the practice of accepting research information from unethical situations, you encourage more. It is not like museum art, which is only in the past. You are relating to the present and to the future, and there is a feedback both ways. If a man's research, which you wouldn't approve of on ethical grounds because of the nature of the experiments, produces a great burst of new knowledge and is accepted, he becomes a scientific hero. There can thus be a relation in terms of providing future motivations if you accept existing or past information.

CALLAHAN: I want to take the other side of this argument on the use of knowledge, because I think this whole question has to be pushed back to much more fundamental questions: Ought we to continue to think that even knowledge *per se* is a good thing? Professor Shinn, you made your question easy by dealing with applied research. But is it really the case that all knowledge, even fundamental knowledge with no evil consequences, is *per se* a good thing?

The whole Western tradition is that the more you know, the better off you are, even if there's nothing you can do with the particular knowledge. Now it seems to me that we are reaching a point, particularly with medical progress, where we might say that there is a diminishing human gain to the additional scientific knowledge. The greatest evil in the world may not be disease, if you will—the greatest evil may be a certain kind of moral defect. Is

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basic knowledge necessarily always good for human beings? The bias has always been that it is *ipso facto* good. I prefer to say that it's neutral.

APOSHIAN: Are you proposing, therefore, that a moratorium should be declared on all new knowledge? You don't know whether that knowledge is going to be good or bad until after you have the knowledge.

CALLAHAN: I think it is an important question. Looking at it historically, it has been pretty clear that all knowledge is a kind of double-edged sword.

DAVIS: A double-edged sword in a much deeper sense. I would suggest that the greatest ethical problem for the world raised by medical discoveries has not been the experiments done on patients without informed consent—though that is a very real moral problem. The real problem has been the role of modern advances in medicine as the main source of world overpopulation.

THOMPSON: It seems there is always a culturally implicit system of values that is unconsciously taken for granted; even survival can be difficult if in fact seeking knowledge for medical progress has interfered with the survival systems of the human species because that progress has prolonged life, raised populations, and eliminated the automatic self-destruction. We always go back into the kind of loop where we cannot really base everything on survival.

DAVIS: Unless we analyze it more deeply. If we are smart enough to agree that survival of the species depends on limiting its density then Zero Population Growth is one answer. Fewer people to survive will survive better.

THOMPSON: But the philosophical system of choices we are going to have to make to enable us to choose between fitting to survival and the survival of the fittest is not itself survival. It is a system of choice, discrimination, and reason, and a system of values that is independent. The two are on philosophically different levels.

DAVIS: Yes, I understand that. Professor Shinn raised some rather broader questions about knowledge as a whole. In a sense

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the limitations we have just been talking about, with respect to medical ethics, are not really a novel idea; in practice there have always been some restraints—for example, with respect to cruelty. Herman Kahn's idea, however, is a more novel one: that there are areas in which we could get scientific information but we had better not, because we are better off without it.

CALLAHAN: I'm trying to think of an instance in terms of survival. Suppose we could have the basic knowledge of the human aging process such that people could live an extra thirty, fifty, seventy years. Once you have that kind of knowledge, it is very difficult not to take advantage of it and use it. You might make the case to support and undertake that line of research on survival alone, but what would it do to the social structure and the population and everything else?

APOSHIAN: Suppose we could design a machine that would enable you to tell what another person is thinking, literally. As you meet your best friend, or your worst enemy, on the street, you would immediately know what he was thinking about you or anything else. What would this do to our society? I would think that we would almost have a mass war on a one-to-one basis. But it would be very interesting scientifically if we could design that machine.

HAMILTON: What is likely to happen is that such a machine will be developed, be highly expensive, and then the countertechnology will also be developed. Then you will have another apparatus which will interfere with your thoughts being received, and you will get into the whole logistics of missiles and antimissiles. That seems to me to be a far more likely future.

DAVIS: I don't think that kind of machine is going to be developed, but I think that it would be very interesting if we could have a modern, sophisticated electronic version of the lie detector and have that visible on TV, in any public controversy or political presentation.

On that note the discussion was brought to a close.

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Climbing the Mountain

(For Cortnie Lowe)

Susan Fromberg Schaeffer

The body of Elvira Shatayev who died on August 7 with seven other Soviet women mountaineers in a blizzard near the top of 23,000 foot Lenin Peak has now been buried. In a remarkable two and one half day ascent, her husband Vladimir led a team of climbers up the peak to try to learn how the women died and to recover the bodies. The thirty-seven year old climbing instructor ignored the advice of his colleagues in making the climb. Recalling the moment he came upon the body, Mr. Shatayev said, "I couldn't approach her for a long time. It was such a contrasting picture. The sky was so blue and she was just lying there." When asked whether the death of his wife had diminished his love for the mountain, Mr. Shatayev replied, "No."—*New York Times*

On top of the mountain
Somewhere in Siberia

The land white,
White sky,
Stunted trees

Even the people
White,
And the animals
Snow-covered,

White shapes
Like white ants
Crawl
A huge tower of sugar.

In Russia.

They are women.

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They want
To leave their fingerprints

On the one blue thing,
The enormous,
The sky.

They never get
Time to take off their gloves.
They are perfect women,

There,
As they lie
Their complexions between

The blue of the sky
The white of the ice
The blue shadow-color cast

On the ice
Statuary,
Holding their poses
Forever

The weather
The only unnatural touch,
Their clothes stiffen

See how peacefully
They sleep, and how

She rests her cheek
In the snow,
Her hair all tucked

Under her hat.
Climbing, they saw

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Through the mountain

Through to their stoves
And their tables,

Waking, Vladimir
Sees her, moving
Between stove, sink and table

The weather is bad.
Snow witch-skirts the foot
Of the mountain.

He goes.
There are warnings.
The land is generous,
Opening its veins

In the loneliness.
The heart of the land is rich.
The state
Gives its approval.

At the top,
It is not the same country.
It is Easter Island.

They are faces
Staring into the sky
And into the ice.
They are stone.
No one moves.

What are they doing here,
These bodies,
Marooned in blue,
Overlooking vast land?

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There is meaning
In their bodies and faces.
They are primitive gods,
Or stone premonitions.

How strange
To find one's wife
Carved out of marble!

There is no taking
Her down,
Her rest, inviolable.

In their peace,
And their silence,
He cannot approach them.

The sky is so blue
And they lie as they are.
At the top of the mountain,

The stones of the air
Form a cold quarry,
Vladimir in its pit,

Disturber of churches,
The climb down
Will be long and hard,

The sheep indifferent.
Why did he come here?
The women untouched,
The sky

Remoter than ever.
They have died at the door of the sky.
He leaves his fingerprints

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On his own tools only.

The snow covers his tracks.
He climbs down.
Diminished.
By what?

His wife sleeps her sleep.
Inhuman.
Once,

He was a man.
She was a wife.
They lived on a mountain of glass.

They were transfigured.

SUSAN FROMBERG SCHAEFFER's most recent books are *Anya*, a novel, and *Granite Lady*, a collection of poems.

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THEATER

The Theater of Honesty

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Our dominant modes of dramatic production conform to the principles of what may be called the Theater of Honesty. For example, Richard Burton said that he had *become* Churchill for the BBC television play. This thespian sincerity is by no means traditional. A way to irritate actors who hold by the honesty principle is to remind them that the Greek word for actor was hypocrite. "No!" they cry in outrage. "What we do is real! We are after the truth! We are sincere!"

Nudity equals honesty. Maybe that notion has something to do with the current fashion of nudity on stage—that, together with our near-lack of censorship. Poor Shaw: his Caesar and Cleopatra not only had to keep their clothes on, they couldn't even talk honestly about the sexual basis of their connection; instead, their sexual energy is transformed into high wit. A production now can repair some of that damage; when the rhetoric becomes too exalted entirely, the players can sex it down by taking off their clothes. Poor Euripides: his Medea not only wore a mask, she was played by a man. How much more honest to have the part played by an actress bare to the waist, as Judith Anderson regretted she could not do when she played Medea in Jeffers's adaptation in the 1940s; unfortunately for her, she was a generation ahead of her time.

This rage for theatrical honesty has another feature—no more fancy language. "How can I truly express what I really feel except in language which is true to the language of real people and real emotions?" Like man I really dig that shit. Jerry and I got these super vibes going for us. Christ, I feel lousy, what's it all about anyway? . . . The Living Theater and its spawn have outdone the Method in this sort of honesty; they have institutionalized the primal human sounds themselves: howls, whines, death rattles, sobs, bellows of rage, eructations, babble. Half a dozen naked actors and actresses moaning in a love pile: how unhypocritical can you get? For, after all, which is more honest, an orgasmic cry or *I love you,* that slippery declaration? Which is truer to actual experience of suicides, a cursing grunt and a long groan or Othello's "Soft you, a word or two before I go" followed by twenty more lines of unsurpassable blank verse?

The theatrical honesty movement at least knows that the limits have been reached before. The story goes that Nero, when a stage killing was called for, had a condemned slave killed during the performance and, when stage love was called for, had actors perform acts of sex. It does not seem likely that our stage will ever be liberated enough for such honesties; only absolute tyrants are absolutely free.

Shakespeare presents the challenge squarely to the true-nude movement: how to make an honest production of his plays despite all that word-wizardry. Psychoanalysis has indoctrinated us about what happens when we are censored: we sublimate and compensate and create, if we are lucky; and Shakespeare was lucky. The censorship he was oppressed by kept him from directly and honestly expressing many of his deepest feelings and concerns. Most of his enormous energy in the plays has been diverted into the poetry, and he was such a wizard with words that it is hard not

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to fall under his spell and think, when you are seeing or reading a play of his, "That's the way things really are (or should be)." But of course it isn't. What do Shakespeare's young lovers do in play after play? Not only do they keep their clothes on; most of the gamboling they perform is in lovely meters. What flummery!

Cinema by its very nature finds it easy to solve the Shakespearean honesty problem. Being a visual art, it simply leaves out most of the words, and those it leaves in have to compete for your interest with the images before you on the screen. With the camera caressing the charming body of a young man in bed in front of you, you are not likely to be carried away by any words Juliet may use to keep Romeo beside her, though it is dawn and high time he should leave. Shakespeare could not take us into the bedroom with them; but our liberated film does it, and once we are there, even preposterously lovely poetry like this dissolves into the general eroticism.

'Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone;
And yet no further than a wanton's bird,
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.

A great challenge to the Theater of Honesty is to exorcise the spell of such poetry as thoroughly as the movies do in play after play. How interesting to inspect Sir Laurence Olivier's Othello's blackened torso, and look how bright red his tongue is! Such screen images can subvert the effect of the play's poetry no matter how magnificently it is rendered by the actor.

But the stage is more evenly balanced between the visual and the verbal. In addition, those are real men and women up there, with real bodies, real voices, real feelings, and they are really speaking those ensorcelling words right now. What to do? The plays can be radically cut; nevertheless, the pressure to leave in most of the great and famous speeches is nearly irresistible. The actors can treat the blank verse like prose, and they can mumble as people do in real life. But that is not an entirely reliable method. Not even Mumbler Brando in the movie of *Julius Caesar* could resist Shakespeare's sorcery; he delivered Mark Antony's great speech splendidly.

For the Theater of Honesty, the severest challenge is to produce the plays with the great poetry included and well delivered and yet keep the audience from falling under its spell. In a word, the production must be so managed that the audience's mind is constantly engaged by distracting elements. And thus far no more reliable distraction has been devised than nudity: as conventionally practiced by good-looking players in their sexual prime, it can be so erotic in effect as to be not only unaesthetic but anti-aesthetic.

Shakespeare's comedies and his tragedies of love present relatively few obstacles to those who would sincerify them. Enough nudity of the conventional kind, and even *Twelfth Night,* that wonder-web, would dwindle into a frivolity. Othello's strangulation of Desdemona is already sexual; strip them, her especially, and there would scarcely be a damp eye in the house. Hamlet is so potentially sexy that there should be little trouble reducing the play to honesty, especially in the scene in Gertrude's bedroom—though the soliloquies might prove bothersome. *Macbeth*? Masked witches without any clothes on their pretty bodies. Lady Macbeth can pull off her nightgown in the sleep-walking scene. She, and perhaps Macbeth too, don't have to be wearing anything during the murder scene—back in the Middle Ages people commonly slept in the buff. (One character who should decidedly keep his clothes on is Iago—"honest, honest Iago.")

Cleopatra was nearly forty when she died, and she had had several children; she was sensual, of course, but there is little reason to suppose that she was beautiful, and a good deal to suppose she was quite fleshy. Now if we have just been watching an actress of appropriate attributes displaying these true facts before us on stage, not even the witchery of Enobarbus's words can make us forget the honest truth. "Age cannot wither her . . ." The hell it can't. "Nor custom stale/Her infinite variety." About as infinite as the Argentine Firecracker's.

The toughest nut to crack is *King Lear,* that utterly preposterous drama. How to keep its poetry from so transforming it that the spec-

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tator seems to experience a sublime reality when seeing it well performed? Stage nudity as now practiced has considerable abortifacient power but perhaps not enough, in and of itself, to do a reliable job on this play.

It is not just a question of quantity. More nudity than is now customary in Shakespearean productions would no doubt be advisable in the neutralizing of any great play. But in the long run it would be ineffective to have, say, Goneril and Regan played by desirable young women who are nude throughout the performance, for too many attractive bodies too long exhibited will cancel the effect one beautiful body can make when displayed to the audience unexpectedly and briefly. No, what is needed is a whole new concept in the orchestration of stage nudity. To begin with, let some of the nude actors and actresses be physically ordinary, unattractive even, or downright deformed. Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are monsters of wickedness, and though lust is far from their worst evil, they have more than enough of it to give the actors an excuse for taking off their clothing. The director should be concerned to find two actresses and an actor who are not only young, intense, and capable of delivering the lines forcibly, expressing with their faces the raging destructiveness that boils up in their souls as soon as they remove the masks of filial affection; he should also select these three for a heightened anatomical attribute that seems destined to keep nudity forever out of the ballet: the flop factor. The three of them should chase each other around the stage as often as plausible so that the demonic malice of the characters may have the majesty cut out of it by the farcical flopping of the actual players' parts.

None of their scenes is as powerful as the justice scene in the storm on the heath, with Lear, who is mad, Edgar, who is pretending to be mad, and the Fool, who is wise-mad. There are people in whom this play, and this scene in particular, generates sublime emotions and intense thoughts of such power as nothing else in this world exceeds (or could exceed). Here is a perfect challenge to the Theater of Honesty: how to produce this scene, uncut, so as to prevent *Lear* devotees from being transported? How to keep the rodents of lust, and giggle, and cynical speculation, and distaste racing around in their minds even as they are watching the play?

One solution presents itself.

Let the actor playing Lear be upwards of eighty. Let Edgar's body be androgynously sensual. Let the Fool be a hunch-backed dwarf with a malformed leg. Let them all be in varying stages of undress as the scene proceeds, and let there be among them, in gesture and glance, a gratuitous byplay of homosexual attraction and jealousy. And let them pass among the audience from time to time, so that their stinking innuendo may have maximum impact. That might do the job. At least, in the absence of available stage eunuchs to parade around nude, it is worth trying.

This past season at Lincoln Center, a nude Troilus got up from the stage floor where he had been lying beside a nude Cressida and walked across the stage with a purplish half-erection, as a result of which spectacle the rest of the act was pretty well wrecked. And eight or ten years ago (in the American Place Theater of Honesty are ingenious and knowledgeable; they may very well discover some solutely nothing except a half-naked young man who must have weighed over four hundred pounds. Introduce to the spectator a stage-image so potent, and his mind will close like a clam against anything else for hours. The solution I have proposed for *Lear* may not be the best. The managers of the Theater of Honesty are ingenious and knowledgeable; they may very well discover some stronger variation on the theme of nudity, one powerful enough to clam the mind of any admirer of Shakespeare—a Goneril who has had a radical mastectomy, for example, though that may be hard to manage, actresses being as vain as they are.

Of course, honesty through ugliness has its risks. Too much of it, and a lot of people will simply leave the theater, or not go near it. Despite the increased permissiveness toward the simpler perversions, the delectability of sexual ugliness does not seem to have made much headway yet in the popular mind. There is a job of education to be done here. In psychohistory and in such confessional poetry as Sylvia Plath's, there is the assump-

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tion that a proof of sincerity lies in the amount and degree of spiritual ugliness displayed The same principle can be applied to physical ugliness. On stage, some nude ugliness already exists from time to time; perhaps erotic interest in boringly nude ugly bodies will be acknowledged as a new and special perversion (shall it be named Warholism?) and added to the standard theatrical props of aesthetic subversion. Sparingly used, it might prove to be as disruptive a weapon as nude beauty; what it lacks in normal erotic appeal it makes up for with unhypocritical depravity. The only serious barrier to this plan is the vanity of actors. Far easier to get a well-built actor to play a sadistic rapist nude than a pot-bellied, flat-bottomed actor to play a loving husband and father with his clothes off.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful that the Theater of Honesty's method of reducing Shakespeare will work for very long. Three centuries ago, Nahum Tate, that Restoration play-doctor for the Theater of Bombast, met the challenge of Shakespeare's power differently. Among other tinkerings by which he diminished the plays, he arranged matters so that Cordelia survived Lear's death and married Edgar. That less painful, less potent, less awe-inspiring version held the British stage for well over a century. Yet here *Lear* is, still intact. The Theater of Honesty's assaults have a good chance of damaging Shakespeare for a while, for a decade or even for a generation--who can say? But the words of those plays will remain in books all over the world, waiting with impenetrable serenity for the playful craftsmen of theater, the elegant hypocrites and word-warlocks, to return and dominate the stage again, relegating nudity to the burlesque houses, night clubs, and cabarets where it has, like the language used in such places, an instrumental function, both low and honest.

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Televising Congress

RICHARD DYER MacCANN

> The picture on the cover is the second authorized photograph of the United States Senate in session. It was taken on December 10, 1971. . . . This photograph, as well as the first (September 24, 1963), was taken by the National Geographic Society.
>
> —A note on the Senate's official tourist leaflet.

For the modern American so familiar with television as a source of information, it is astonishing to discover that these two cameras were the only ones allowed in the Senate chamber before 1974. The House of Representatives allowed television coverage of its opening day in 1947, a brief celebration viewed by coaxial cable in Philadelphia and New York as well as Washington. But until last year, TV technicians have turned up in the House only for visits by presidents, visiting heads of state, or astronauts. Except for participants, newsmen with note pads, and a maximum of 732 visitors in the gallery, the regular daily proceedings of self-government have been hidden from the world.

This solemn tradition of invisibility is now giving way to the natural affinity between publicity and politics. The Senate of the United States, which met in secret session from 1789 to 1794, has been alerted to the tremendous political value of the overhearing ear, the ego-catching eye, that is television. The telecast of the Senate's confirmation vote for Nelson Rockefeller as vice president is a sign of impending thaw. The House of Representatives, too, is warming to the potential of public performance, attested by this year's televised swearing-in of new members.

Many Senators and Representatives were among the millions of viewers on those epochal evenings during the summer of 1974 when the members of the House Judiciary Committee deliberated and agonized and were publicly persuaded—by tape-recorded evidence—that President Nixon was imminently impeachable. Those evenings provided a modest, if unprecedented, spectacle. Their general effect was to rebuild a sense of pride in the procedures of representative government—a sense of pride which, according to public opinion polls, had been in steady decline. More specifically, the effect of the broadcast sessions was the re-election of committee members who so publicly voted "aye" for impeachment. Congressmen who look pessimistically on television exposure are more likely to note, however, the electoral defeat of committee members who so publicly voted "no." Publicity is a two-edged sword.

Congress on television? Even for the most accomplished speaker, there is a nervous thrill of terror about being continuously recorded on camera—which necessitates being on best behavior every minute, in committee or on the floor. Yet over and over again in recent hearings and reports on the issue of

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televising Congress, three main premises have been voiced: (1) there is a strongly felt public cynicism about elected officials that needs to be countered by something more than pious phrases; (2) television is by far the most "trusted" medium of news and information; and (3) the technology now available means that telecasting no longer requires heavy cables and camera mounts and banks of lights.

After thirty-two proposals over three decades—Senator Claude Pepper offered the first such resolution in 1944—some form of continuous broadcasting seems closer to reality now than ever before. Senate Resolution 39, when it was offered to the 94th Congress on January 28, had the backing of thirty members, including majority and minority leaders Mike Mansfield and Hugh Scott. A similar House resolution was introduced on March 3 and the Rules Committee held hearings in April. If not passed this year, such a proposal will no doubt be back on the docket next year.

The balance in favor of televising Congress has shifted radically in just four years, and Richard Nixon clearly deserves the credit. He had a marked preference for pre-empting prime time for his various pronouncements, many of which were deemed highly political by the Democrats. In his first thirty-nine months in office, Nixon appeared no fewer than thirty-one times in the prime evening hours, and there seemed to be no way of getting comparable attention for opposing political views, or for the views of anyone in Congress, on the air. Senator Edmund S. Muskie has cited the example of Nixon's televised veto of the Health, Education and Welfare appropriations bill in January of 1970:

> The entire viewing audience of one of television's most popular programs—the "Laugh-In" show—sat captured while the President spoke. The position the President advocated was contested by overwhelming majorities in Congress with equal access to information. That Congressional position was never heard or seen by those Americans. If the President happens to be wrong, there is little that can be done to make that known to the people.

Richard Nixon claimed he was speaking for the whole people, not just for a party. The networks claimed it was enough for them to represent a wide spectrum of political opinions in their regular newscasts; the Federal Communications Commission upheld this network view of its own "fairness doctrine"; and the Supreme Court eventually declared (in 1973) that, except during campaigns, the public did not even have a right to buy political advertising on television. A group of senators did succeed in buying time to oppose the President's Cambodian adventure. The Democratic National Committee got on the air once, thanks to a CBS offer of free time. And once each year somebody from the Congress has had the chance to reply to the President's State of the Union message—but not during prime time.

In 1970, Senator William Fulbright introduced a resolution amending the 1934 Communications Act to require television networks to "provide a reasonable amount of public service time" to members of the House and Senate to talk about "issues of public importance" at least four times a year. Network officials objected, and so did Dean Burch, Nixon's appointee as chairman of the FCC. Any such notion of an institutional "right of access" to private broadcast media, Burch said, would represent a "sharp departure from the basic scheme of broadcasting in this country."

The hearings on the Fulbright Resolution led to no specific action, but they did serve to identify the major enemy—the executive branch of government. Television, Senator Fulbright declared, has fundamentally altered the traditional system of checks and balances under the Federal Constitution. The TV spotlight nowadays is on one man, as the representative of the whole people, who is seen at night in the homes of Americans. The law-making process, with all its deliberateness and its weighing of interests in society, has become a shadowy background fixture, habitually accused of foot dragging, in contrast to a bold executive who holds center stage.

By December 1972 there was a growing feeling that the House and Senate ought to come out of hiding. The great television landmarks of senatorial committees were well remembered: Estes Kefauver's crime in-

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vestigations and the long, bitter hearings that led to the censure of the Senate's own Joseph McCarthy. Under the 1970 Reorganization Act, the House had finally given its committees the authority to open meetings to television. Even traditionally secretive joint conference committees had appeared before the cameras for the first time. The Joint Committee on Congressional Operations asked the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress to make a special study of "Congressional capability for utilizing the communications media more effectively." More was intended than a short-range public relations effort to label Congress, like the movies, "better than ever." There has always been strong Congressional resentment of the hundreds of publicity officers in executive agencies, and an equally strong sense that even a full battalion of mimeograph machines could never redress the balance. Some way to use television had to be found that was congruent with Congress's role in the constitutional structure.

A report by John G. Stewart, a communications consultant, examined a variety of ways by which Congress could be brought before the people, including the possibility of network television "specials." But members of Congress have been guests on the "Today" show often enough to know that fitting oneself into an entertainment pattern is a less than satisfactory way of getting the job done. Public affairs programs are not much better. If the executive branch is Congress's constitutional competitor, the fourth estate never allows Congress to forget its adversary role. Senators have all too often sat in the bullpen of "Meet the Press" or suffered the headline-seeking probes of "Face the Nation." Investigative reporters, proud of their muckraking tradition, are not about to serve the House of Representatives as television anchor men for the Ways and Means Committee. Nor are Johnny Carson and Barbara Walters likely to circulate on the floor of the Senate in search of amusing interviews. Senator Robert Byrd, assistant majority leader, put it bluntly: "No one, I am sure, wants to see the Senate covered in the same hysterical, frenzied manner that political conventions are handled."

By 1974, with the drama of Watergate roaring in the foreground, it had become clear that the most dignified role for Congress was to be the host, not the guest. As the Joint Committee began its hearings in February, under the chairmanship of Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana, the main focus turned toward recording proceedings "from gavel to gavel" and making all or part of this pictorial Congressional Record available for broadcast. A 1968 survey of fifty nations showed that twenty-one already allowed television coverage of lawmaking bodies. Donald Tacheron and the committee research staff found that forty states now permit microphones or TV cameras in at least one house of the legislature. The United Nations, furthermore, was seen as the "outstanding example of comprehensive coverage," operating its own television service and providing "a direct feed to the three major U.S. TV networks," plus videotapes of principal UN committees and closed-circuit coverage throughout UN headquarters, supplemented by an audio system. The cost to the UN was about $1,250,000, with slightly less than half of this annually "recovered by network subscription and service fees paid by broadcasters in the United States and other countries."

The more the Metcalf Committee talked about a "feed" of the day's debates, in the style of the United Nations, the clearer it became that a total recording process held little attraction for commercial broadcasters. They would be willing enough to participate in such a "feed." They would of course use only extracts. Translated, this meant, in the words of Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois, that commercial broadcasters would probably use "either short, sensational statements or heated exchanges."

The Public Broadcasting Service, on the other hand, seemed quite relaxed about the prospect of filling many hours with political debate. PBS had in fact transmitted fifty-one of fifty-three sessions of the Senate Watergate investigation. National Public Radio, between 1971 and 1974, had broadcast more than 550 hours of committee hearings from Capitol Hill. The motives behind such activity might be suspect on two counts: PBS and NPR both need to please their sponsor, Congress itself, and since Congressional ap-

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propriations had so far been pitifully small (compared to that allotted a first-rate public broadcast service like the BBC), a continuous direct feed from Congress could provide a cheap way to fill some time. The fact remained that PBS was the logical agency. There was no need to set up a new quasi-public corporation, or to ask the Library of Congress to undertake such an unaccustomed audio-visual task. PBS was there, and could be "invited" to do the job.

Opening Congress to the eye of television seems especially appealing as a presidential year approaches. At the same time, as Senator John Pastore and others have observed, the bicentennial celebration is a remarkably appropriate time to introduce a continuous exhibition of the processes of decision making in government. The leadership seems convinced, as Senator Byrd suggested, that this is "an idea whose time has come." The momentum seemed especially strong in 1974, when the House voted 385 to 25 for television coverage of the then impending debate on impeachment.

On the other hand, many in both houses share the fears of Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, the lone dissenter on the Metcalf Committee. Senator Helms not only objects to the distraction of television as preventing "an atmosphere of free, open, and robust debate," but he predicts that televising the debates would result in new kinds of public misunderstanding of the complex procedures and compromises so necessary to the legislative process. Both, in his view, would tend to encourage a "radical concept" of direct democracy, in which Congressmen, constantly under surveillance by their constituents, might be less and less willing to exercise their own judgment.

Another issue lies in the immediate background. An important argument for—as well as against—the broadcasting of Congressional proceedings is the possiblity that the format that television demands will force changes in those proceedings. And indeed, the move toward visibility is supported not only by such liberal Democratic Senators as McGovern, Mondale, Humphrey, Stevenson, and Clark and by such liberal Republicans as Percy and Javits, but also by younger activists in both houses who want to see procedures changed and new forms of debate instituted. Such efficiency is not uniformly wished for by all members of the Congress, even if it offers the prospect of improving the public's trust in representative government.

One of the most impressive presentations before the Metcalf Committee was by a group from Connecticut. Two representatives of the community-owned UHF public television service brought with them an actual videotape of a session of Connecticut's House of Representatives. Even more significant, State Senate Majority Leader Lewis Rome reported that the following procedural changes have occurred concurrently with extensive television coverage since 1973: committees from both houses now meet jointly, and never in closed executive session; house sessions and committee meetings are now scheduled on separate days of the week (no committee hearings to keep members off the floor, no quorum calls to interrupt committees); work is spread through the months so that end-of-session business is conducted with decorum instead of the boisterous haste of past years; chairmen are now better prepared for meetings and conduct them with dispatch; the state senate even meets promptly at noon.

Television, instead of exposing what may be termed the "sleeping-member" problem, could have the effect of dispensing with it. Doubters in Congress have often questioned whether creative cameramen might not be tempted to pan slowly across empty seats and zoom in on members slumped over their desks as speakers drone inexorably on. Standards can be developed, of course, for avoiding such editorializing. At the United Nations television cameramen are carefully instructed ahead of time neither to avoid a sleeping Security Council delegate nor to linger on him unduly, but to pan past him casually without stopping. Obviously the more direct recourse in an elective chamber is to provide for careful homework, brisk chairmanship, and comments that are brief and to the point. Under such circumstances the presence of television may brighten things up not only for the public but for the long-suffering legislator as well.

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Television could also dispose of the demagogue, instead of encouraging him—the peril most often predicted by critics. From all accounts, what happens in practice is a period of extreme TV-consciousness followed by a swift return to nearly normal habits. In the Florida legislature, when continuous television broadcasts began in 1973, "grandstanders" were subjected to "ribbing from their colleagues." Soon the cameras were more or less forgotten. The sense of being on display does keep members from munching on sandwiches and reading newspapers. But monopolizing the microphone turns out to be especially counter-productive. Television is viewed at home, where shouters are not welcome. As long ago as 1937, when New Zealand instituted radio broadcasts of its parliament, fears were expressed that spellbinding speeches would be the order of the day. Three years later the New Zealand *Radio Daily* observed: "Windbags who took a lot of time to say nothing brilliantly have been defeated, and members who fumbled and stumbled but who did have something to say have been reelected."

Television in its most characteristic form is a "live" show during which anything can happen. Like the sports arena, the legislative arena may eventually develop its fans and its moments of high drama. Is this the direction politics on television should take? Should legislative habits be consciously shifted in the direction of more drama, not less? Should speeches be longer, not shorter, and the Congress of the United States try to recapture the days when "giants" like Webster and Hayne debated the meaning of the Constitution?

Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota has proposed to the Metcalf Committee a parliamentary-style "question and report" period in which cabinet and other administration officials would come before the whole Senate for grand inquisitions on public policy. Others have suggested that the new provisions for comprehensive study of the annual budget will set the stage, especially in the House of Representatives, for a new kind of debate on broad policies of taxing and spending. Such arranged performances would be a far cry from the American committee tradition as it has developed in recent decades—a tradition of staff research followed by rather narrow factual questions during hearings. But there is no reason why television's transmission of daily sessions could not accommodate some dramatic debates.

Thus far in England the Mother of Parliaments has refused to put the drama of "question time" on television. In 1966, by a single vote, the British House of Commons refused to experiment with television. In his book, *The Political Impact of Mass Media,* Colin Seymour-Ure argues that over the years many members of Parliament have looked on television as nothing less than a rival institution, capable of replacing the deliberative processes of Parliament itself. In 1955, Winston Churchill referred to "these vast, new robot organizations" of television and radio as being threats to the primacy of Parliament; and for a number of years the BBC was in fact forbidden to transmit any news whatever about questions under debate in the House.

Recently the practical relationship between television and British politicians has undergone significant change. Television has sometimes pre-empted big political issues before the House of Commons could stage a debate. In 1971, on the European Economic Community, and in 1972, in a three-hour program entitled "The Question of Ulster," the BBC took the initiative and several of its performers were indeed members of Commons. The possibility that television can offer a broader "roof" for public debate than the crowded House of Commons affords is no longer remote. In 1902, "question time" was shifted from evening to afternoon to accommodate the newspapers. Will Parliament now move into a television studio, or will television be invited into Parliament?

On February 24 of this year a wary House of Commons decided against television once more, this time by twelve votes. A new experiment in radio, however, was approved by a heavy majority (354 to 182). As in 1968, it was to be a four-week experiment, but this time not limited to closed-circuit tests. The broadcast "feed" was to be shared by both the BBC and commercial TV companies. Extracts were to be used on the long-established Radio 4 program, "Today in Parliament." According to the London *Times,* BBC Tele-

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vision was also to have access to the tapes.

Certainly one of the reasons for delaying television coverage of Parliament has been the fear of what the BBC might do once it is given the power to edit the day's events. Public television is less popular with British members of Parliament than commercial television is with American senators. BBC interviewers have a habit of making cabinet ministers uncomfortable under questioning. Prime ministers, in turn, have not hesitated to make uncomplimentary remarks about the BBC.

When in the summer of 1973 the BBC tried to deal with Parliament as a theme, one would have thought the nation's public broadcasting system was obsessed by some gigantic Oedipus complex. A group of MPs in the studio were confronted with a crowd of people who at the top of their voices doubted whether members of Parliament were fulfilling any valid function. This wild and rather un-British program was called "A Question of Confidence." It called forth, predictably, a protest from MPs and an apology from the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Meanwhile, Granada Television put five hours of the Parliamentary process on the air as directly as possible and as politely as could be conceived, at the unobtrusive experimental hour of 10:30 P.M. One program was a *cinéma vérité* study of innumerable subcommittee meetings on a consumer protection bill; another showed members of Parliament in a simulated select committee hearing. "The State of the Nation: Parliament" was clearly Parliament's own show, having participated fully in setting the ground rules of the game. It seemed to be a serious bid by Granada and commercial television for a videotape recording contract.

In England, too, some sort of collaboration or pooling is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Outsiders do not always remember that the Independent Broadcasting Authority is a public corporation, required by its license to serve, not the advertisers, but the needs of the nation. While IBA, like NBC, would not be eager to program large blocks of time, its engineers might conceivably provide chapters of a Hansard-on-the-air two or three times a week to BBC-2, the culturally-oriented UHF channel. Huw Wheldon, BBC-TV managing director, says his preference is for ninety-minute segments taken as a whole from actual debates, not the "pedantic journalism" of brief extracts or summaries. Combined with occasional cabinet-sponsored documentaries on specific decisions, such a service might become a channel of contact between government and people.

On the American scene, further problems and dangers arise. Can the views of 435 congressmen and 100 senators be adequately represented when each house presents its own show? Will there have to be a mounting accumulation of staff communications experts for every senator and every committee? In view of the heavy advantage to incumbents when Congress goes on the air, can public television somehow be empowered to seek out new faces as challengers for legislative seats? Will the managers of Congressional debates promote the most popular fights, and will the heavyweight challenge—Congress versus President—always draw the biggest gate? Can shrill partisan statements be avoided—or self-serving reports such as "Operation Abolition," created out of television news footage in 1960 by the House Un-American Activities Committee?

The machinery is bound to daunt us. We must expect to see passions run high in living color, and truth occasionally trampled in the drive to get attention. Advocacy has never been too nice in its discriminations. But in an age of constantly compounding surplus of communication, the serious news of government can be smothered and distorted unless wise gatekeepers and dedicated artists can help Congress and president reach the people with messages that matter. Not every senator can be his own Cronkite, yet in some degree the public's representatives must become professionals in the new age of television. Fortunately, we can expect the private media to have at the ready a full arsenal of skeptical probes.

It is reassuring to remember that there is no ideal TV personality. The type who is brisk, slick, and "sincere" will always generate his opposite, the fatherly, relaxed, somewhat grumpy and laconic politician who has the conventional folk wisdom. Television can

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make it possible for leaders of quieter personality to have their say.

A foremost problem of politics on American television has in fact been the predominance of the crisis atmosphere of elections. The charismatic leader who can stir a crowd or charm a housewife may be able to win an election, but he is often not useful in legislative halls and may not be a very effective governor or president, either. The modern public deserves a closer look at the daily processes of decision making—how things really work, how elected leaders perform their tasks, and, by implication, how the next election might shift the balance on crucial issues. Then voters will be better prepared to choose the candidate who functions best, instead of the one who is the best campaigner. When Congress is on the air, the evidence for such choices will be available every day. At the same time, television can show us that politics is not just a game but a life of endless persuasion.

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Stoking the Oedipal Furnace

Edward Dahlberg's *Because I Was Flesh*

HERBERT LEIBOWITZ

> It is sin to believe in man's character. Man is continually astonished at the moral weather of his identity.
>
> Edward Dahlberg, *The Flea of Sodom*

One of the blandishments of autobiography is that it permits the "making of a marvelous mask." From behind his mask of complacent humility, Franklin could instruct his son and young America in the prolific, rewarding virtues of self-discipline and civic duty. Similarly, William Carlos Williams could adopt the persona "Doc"—deliverer of babies, votary of the local gods, and suburban bumpkin, discomfited by that impassive prince of the avant-garde, Marcel Duchamp —all the while demonstrating his poetic tenacity and sophistication. If the memory of these two men is fallible, guileful, selective, that is no fatal defect, as the artless style of their autobiographies reassures us. They display no rancor against themselves or their times; they lack the martyr's temperament. Their versatility and useful vocations ensure a sort of democratic insouciance that informs the exuberantly haphazard structures of their autobiographies. Nevertheless, their supple opinions do not challenge the premise that out of the welter of event and thought and feeling some sense can be made of a man's life. They partially disprove Tocqueville's contention that "democracy turns man's imagination away from externals to concentrate it on himself alone."

Such is not the case with Edward Dahlberg. "Autobiographical books are plain, honest perjury," he remarks in *Alms for Oblivion*. The present is an absolute sphinx and the past an equally grim riddle: "We never learn anything, but simply call old errors by new names." Doomed to repetition, "we only do what we are," and what we are is hopelessly duplicitous. Man's nature is vicious, "politics mutilates the individual," and knowledge is intellectual pride, a deluded comfort, since it does not influence our behavior. Above all, we are the miserable prey of our erotic furies.

Character, Dahlberg insists like a hanging judge, is intransigently fixed; devious, murderous, guilty of eating his own nature, a Cain bearing the stigma of his separation, man seeks atonement in vain. This blunt determinism, gleefully condemning all explanations of motive as corrupt self-interest, is hardly an inducement for composing a memoir. Not surprisingly, Dahlberg calls *Because I Was Flesh* "an autobiography of my faults" and, like a Missouri Rousseau, confesses his vices, defects, and "flinty heart," thus validating to himself that the self is an emotional Mojave Desert.

Dahlberg, reluctant to admit that he has much of a central consciousness ruling over the sequences of memories that could comprehend his life, chooses a flexible structure. *Because I Was Flesh*, he announces, is a "memoir of my mother's body." Lizzie Dahlberg is perceived from the outside, with

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Edward Dahlberg's suffering shifted to the charged prose style. Strict chronology has nothing to do with the psychological poetry of the mother-son relationship; *that* exists in the timeless realm of myth and dream.

Finally, *Because I Was Flesh* is also a portrait of the American artist as Proteus: porcupine, vagabond, fox, saintly fool, and "crazy waif of the Muse." By reviling himself for his shameful failings—inconstancy, unruly will, impotence of feeling—Dahlberg licenses his performance as the prophetic scourge of the world's follies. As he tells, ruefully and comically, the story of his (and his mother's) endless humiliations, he embroiders fact with fiction. He becomes the dervish of words, an author of wisdom literature for a world in which such wisdom is useless. A combative, peevish man, he plays a repertoire of roles with self-delighting or nasty bravura: the huffy philosopher as clown, denying all our received opinions; Job, scratching his sores, railing at the injustice of his plight and excoriating the comforters; Ishmael, his hand against the world; the moralist, humbling man for his stupidity and shopkeeper mind. Only the "potent sanctified lies of art" can redeem the galling contradictions of his life, and "ease" (a favorite word) the pains and social ugliness that affront him. *Because I Was Flesh* is thus a calculated leveling of our individual and collective self-esteem; heroism or a scrap of self-knowledge enters our consciousness only through the occasional windfalls of art. The morally examined life is a necessary fraud.

Dahlberg hoards his wretched experiences as his mother Lizzie did her orange peels and dog-eared postal cards. They are his bag of sacred relics containing the scattered clues to his blighted origins, and he fingers them remorselessly. "Why was it impossible for me to let go of the misery of my boyhood?" he asks himself, expecting no suitable answer. If America is a "transient Golgotha," Dahlberg is its suffering servant, stumbling from the heavy burden of his double cross: his Oedipal passion and his absent father. It is an ordeal and a pleasure he cannot—and does not want to—let go, because it is the major source of his creativity.

Because I Was Flesh is a masterpiece of Oedipal obsession, a poetic memoir of primal sunderings and rages. At its heart, as at the heart of all Dahlberg's writings, lies his exasperated love for his mother Lizzie and his quest for knowledge of his father Saul, a feckless womanizer, whose desertion is the other unappeasable demon of his childhood. His tainted birthright is an irrevocable, violent prologue—and he subsequently reaps the whirlwind. Cast out like Ishmael with the unreliable protection of his mother (Hagar), and soon abandoned by her, he roams America (and Europe), his own mortified condition a mirror of cosmic lawlessness and human disloyalty. As with Oedipus, the monstrous sphinx exacts its revenge: in memory he relives his grievances with a bitter compulsiveness. He, too, is blinded (in one eye); he turns disputatious, cranky, and self-pitying; he rants and complains that his guilt and punishment are out of proportion to his sin.

Where Oedipus at Colonus achieved a mysterious grace, Dahlberg's nomadic spirit remains bruised, defiant, wise in the lore of antiquity yet without that fundamental self-awareness that might reconcile him to his bereaved past. Yet paradoxically *Because I Was Flesh* converts Dahlberg's long internal exile into the consoling power of myth. A Book of Lamentations, it moves in a shower of aphorisms between comedy and prayer. For once, Dahlberg holds his frenetic egotism in check long enough to assemble and enshrine the tattered figure of his mother, proprietress of the Star Lady Barbershop, and to sketch her as Hogarth might have, against the raffish boom-town milieu of Kansas City, Missouri, in the early 1900s.

In the rich iconography of the autobiography, Lizzie acts Mary Magdalene and Mater Dolorosa to Dahlberg's Jesus, Hagar to his Ishmael, and Delilah to his Samson. She dominates the book as effortlessly as she does her son's emotions. The facts of her life are simple. The daughter of a large polyglot Orthodox Jewish family, she comes to America not to escape religious persecution but to flee a "loveless roof," only to undergo a series of unlucky episodes that would crowd a picaresque novel. (Hers is not the standard immigrant drama; as American as a cowboy, she feels no nostalgia for Europe.) A

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brother peddles her at sixteen to an older man, Harry Simonowitz. She bears him three sons in this dank marriage, one of whom dies. Dissatisfied with her lot, she gives up the two sons to an orphanage—a pattern to be repeated later with Edward and his half brother Michael, not mentioned in the book—and takes up with Saul Gottdank, a stagy gigolo with waxed mustaches, curly hair, and a charlatan's smile, like Westervelt's in Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*. From this unpromising union Dahlberg was born on July 22, 1900, in a Boston charity hospital, the unwanted child of an impulsive error. His pedigree, Dahlberg says again and again, fatally engulfed him; it surely crippled his relations with his mother and women throughout his life (he has been married seven times). Lizzie and Saul traveled from city to city for some months as itinerant barbers, Saul filching money from the till to spend on whores. The liaison couldn't last. Saul vanished in 1905 and Lizzie landed in Kansas City.

Saul flits through the book as a seriocomic ghost of an elusive paternity. For Dahlberg, he is a low-class Lothario, humorously caddish like the stockyards men and loafers who patronize Lizzie's barbershop. While not a King Saul or Saint Paul, he haunts his son's reveries. He is treated with a burlesque cheerfulness in the early pages of the book:

> Whatever Saul was not even Saul knew; he was born corrupt, and what he did was natural to him. What was bad for others was good for him. A kind of charitable act on his part would have been gross deceit. He fobbed women when he desired to lie with them—which is nature. This is not hypocrisy because it is the way the world is made. Saul was some baleful seminal drop of a depraved rotting forefather; he lived solely to discharge his sperm.

If Dahlberg begins by accepting his father's seedy sensuality with the satirist's amused tolerance—"Only a city could slake Saul's venery," he observes elsewhere—it is because Saul practices no moral dissembling. His sexual appetite may not have toppled the towers of Ilium—he is, after all, just a faintly absurd philanderer—but that unalterable character, and the itch of sex when scratched, brings disastrous consequences: The wages of heedless nature is emotional destitution. As the passage builds, Dahlberg's charity runs out. His misgivings and his rage are directed at the way Edward Dahlberg is made; he is the product of that "baleful seminal drop," and he bitterly concludes that if nature involves such a thoughtless act of creation, kinship is itself depraved, comfortless, and selfish. What was good for Saul was bad for others.

In an adjacent passage, Dahlberg continues to muse on the problem:

> The truth is that we can only perfect our vices, for we die with all our sins entire, and every wrong thought or vision in the child matures in the man. However, the moral combat against our flinty hearts must be waged; otherwise we eat ourselves in disgust and do nothing but feed and gender. There is nothing more important than this incessant warfare with our hard demons which makes men better thinkers but not better men. The only comfort that God can take in His Creation, after He has grown weary with the winds, India, the Cordilleras of the Andes, an earthquake or a tornado is that man is a reflective beast. God caused men to die because He wanted them to think; our first parents ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil though they knew it would cause them to die. All wisdom is sensual since it comes from the body.

These brilliant tricky proverbs of Dahlberg's private hell, hammered into urgent moral universals, come close to being a recital of his Nicene Creed. And they provide a militant excuse for his own character. Eros and Thanatos are locked in an unstable marriage, a *folie à deux,* out of which impasse man can extract himself with only partially satisfying half-measures and ingenious compromises. "Sex absorbs all the functions of the soul," Dahlberg quotes Pascal; it is a temporary escape from loneliness. Dahlberg celebrates the joys of an irresistible libido, like his mother's, identifying it with health; but he also adopts a puritanical contempt for man's sexual greed. Like Jonathan Edwards, he preaches sternly that Eros becomes Eris, the cause of strife and ultimately of death, "the skulking demiurgic glutton." All sexual transports are a form of involuntary servitude. Indeed, Dahlberg often sounds like a Middle American Hamlet—registering disgust at his mother's carnal weaknesses, which cannot be controlled (as a young man in Los Angeles

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and Berkeley he puts on an "antic disposition" and practices a wild celibacy, but his "monkish behavior" does not last) and which he takes as a betrayal of himself. His parents' sexual legacy is poisonous: faithlessness, he believes, is as inexorable as genes. No emotional reparations are possible for such acts. Dahlberg's parents, unlike our "first parents," were victims of moral muddle; their will "was too sick to love the child of their lust." "Lizzie was guided by the laws of her body and the fear of any excesses that might curtail her days on the earth; Saul did not care how long he lived so long as he lived virile."

Saul never struggled against his defect, never risked expulsion from the illusory Eden of sensual pleasure, so he never became that paradoxical creature, "a reflective beast." (Lizzie did struggle and gains Dahlberg's deepest allegiance.) Dahlberg's psychological hypotheses often appear in the guise of philosophical precepts; his reasoning is associative, gnomic, circular, not logical or linear: we must engage our "hard demons" in single combat, even though we know beforehand that it can have no effect on our moral conduct. Our "only comfort"—and glory—like the weary God's, is that we think, but our knowledge reduces to three bleak, fruitless propositions: Death is the mother of Truth, the child is the corrupt father of the man, wisdom comes from the body: the self is a replica of Dahlberg's shattered family.

The first ninety pages of *Because I Was Flesh* lovingly re-create the bawdy atmosphere of the Star Lady Barbershop, a tawdry sweatshop transfigured into a palace of pleasures, which railroad men, cowboys, and businessmen frequented for a shave, agreeable flirtations, and banter. So high do the sexual fevers run, heating the senses, that all of Kansas City seems to be in rut; even the flush of a toilet or smelly shoes excite desire. The coarse vitality of their "amorous schemings" endears the lady barbers to Dahlberg, as though the Wife of Bath had set up shop in Kansas City and tutored the wild farm girls in how to speculate in men. These "virgins" trim their lamps as they trim their customers' hair—Daughters of Autolycus, fleecing and gulling the men. Breach-of-promise suits abounded; "vice was good for business"—lady barbershops were often fronts for brothels—but the worship of Mammon was secondary to the worship of Priapus. Dahlberg savors their wanton genius at easing the woes and aches of the body. For them, money is health and sex generative: in seeking either, principles are a bother that their "homemade conscience" cannot afford. Emma Moneysmith, the chief beauty, a sort of Mormon Venus, "was good as she could be, and were she to try to be any better, she would be worse. . . . Emma would have believed in virtue had she found anybody else who used it. Lying, cheating, fornication and fleecing were contagious diseases she had caught from the most respectable folk who patronized the shop." Prudes, Dahlberg scoffs, like scrawny poultry, were not only bad for business, but they had a mean spirit. Though Emma was murdered by a cowboy for her "amiable thievery," she did not have a cold heart that plots with loveless malice the harm of others.

But Dahlberg's praise of these women is edged with mistrust. (He has been a lifelong misogynist.) His vocabulary for women, ransacked from dictionaries and Elizabethan slang, sounds like a recruiting officer's handbill for a whorehouse: tarts, wenches, trulls, whores, slovens, chits, chippies, prostitutes, trollops, strumpets, fillies, and jillflirts, Dahlberg would protest that the terms are affectionate and exact, not demeaning, for the lady barbers were as erotically stimulated, and stimulating, as Semiramis—and equally as dangerous. Women are natural, a term that is, as we have seen, honorific but suspect:

> When the time came she would be a steadfast wife and provide a husband who cherished her with a jolly, bawdy bed and fat gammons. She would look just as legal and righteous as any other householder. Love restores the blind, the palsied and the virgin, and even if a lady barber smeared her wedding sheet with Heinz ketchup, no bridegroom should be so foolish as the examine it. A man who scrutinizes everything he does—or someone else does to him—will die swearing or live to run mad in the streets with no other cover for his nude soul but a syllogism. Besides, a woman is a marvelous chameleon creature, for she can cheat, lie and copulate, and still be the tenderest pullet.

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This sly and impudent tribute depicts women as alluringly fickle, gay roisterers who, properly appreciated, turn into jolly Griseldas (that ancient commonplace, the good-hearted prostitute!). But although Dahlberg finds their shams charming, he cannot follow his own chivalric advice: from paranoia *he* would send his bride's sheet to a laboratory for chemical analysis, for he scrutinizes himself and others with a Calvinist's alertness to minute signs, and in Los Angeles and Berkeley runs mad in the streets with no cover for his nude soul—and shaved head—than a passel of Nietzschean syllogisms. He is a perjured witness.

These lady barbers, who might have been lifted from the pages of *The Beggar's Opera,* form a chorus of plebeian women and serve as a backdrop to the Oedipal drama with its theme: "Every mother, even while she lives, is the pit and grave of the son." Although Lizzie is tormented by erotic longings and has a number of affairs, she is not, Dahlberg insists, the madam of a brothel, and is offended by the girls' sporting and calculating promiscuity. For Lizzie, sex is a "heart's balm," like her quack remedies, enemas, and penchant for useless surgery whenever life disappoints and threatens to crush her. Despite her henna-dyed hair, long nose, and unkempt appearance, she has a dignified air of "genteel breeding" that the seamy barbershop cannot destroy. She is not common. She is an "angelic pariah" whose string of "uninterrupted humiliations" foreshadows and affects his own emotional destiny. He understands that "What she wished above all else was a place in society," that "the asceticism of everyday toil" was the one "social ecstasy" she could count on. Bad luck dogs her and conspires with her faults of character—she is an irremediable dupe about men—to make "Kansas City the burial grounds of my poor mother's hopes."

As a mature man, Dahlberg tries with a gallant idealism to cross the chasm between himself and his mother, conceding that she had what he lacked: sense, "sexual understanding and a charitable pity for others," but black thoughts keep sabotaging his good intentions—the barely repressed returns. Foremost, he reproaches Lizzie for not providing him with a family or at least acknowledging, despite her muttered curses against "verdammter Saul," that he was in fact the boy's father.

What infuriated Dahlberg as a child and continued to rankle him as an adult was his mother's combination of seductiveness and neglect. Dahlberg describes the young Edward as a puny, finicky, emotionally stunted boy, sensitive to vermin and often vomiting; like a character in Chaplin's films, the "city was his parent." He would hang all over the men who came to court his mother, a suppliant for a morsel of affection from these surrogate fathers (and rivals), but they usually rebuffed him, throwing him back onto his mother's whimsical care.

Lizzie seems to have chronically roused her son. After a bath she would rub her naked body in front of him, as if he were not there. She would urinate in doorways while he shuffled embarrassedly in the street. Most provokingly, he was supplanted by a series of men and agitated by the cries of lovemaking. She was a false Penelope with a "makeshift conscience" who had given in to the importunities of the suitors, while spurning his, thus betraying her tacit promises of forever suckling him. And when, finally, he was a nuisance, as with Captain Harry Smith, one of his mother's lovers, he was shunted off unceremoniously to the orphanage. This was the primal outrage, as if the Virgin Mary had refused to nurture the Infant Jesus. In a dream she appears to him as "two empty udders." "She did not know what to do with herself or with him. She had reached the zero point in her freezing heart."

Dahlberg's seven years at the Jewish Orphan Asylum in Cleveland institutionalized his profound sense of being cast off. He was an orphan in spirit if not in fact. Tyrannized and brutalized by monstrous mediocrities who failed to discharge their scriptural and ethical responsibility to care for them, these luckless boys and girls learned only the stratagems of survival. The regime was martial, the food foul, nature pinched or altogether absent. The orphans lived like prisoners in barracks, with numbers instead of names (some tried to escape before they were paroled), wore drab uniforms, and listened to treacly sermons ex-

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horting them to be good. (Dickens's experience at the bootblacking factory was a mild lesion compared to Dahlberg's trauma.) "They had no manual skill in affections and were sore afraid of touching another except to harm or punish." As if to wipe out the ignominy of their violated and injured selves, Dahlberg confers epic status on them, calling the rolls of heroes as worthy of remembering as warriors at Troy. The naming is a benediction: "Mugsy, Prunes, Shrimp, Bah, Mooty, Spunk, Bonehead Balaam, Moses Mush Tate, Phineas Watermelonhead, Mushmelonhead, Sachemhead," Mush Tate, "the Socratic dialectician of the orphan home, . . . a liar, a thief, and a rhetor," masterfully sums up the most terrifying experience of a "vacant" and affectionless world in *Because I Was Flesh:* "God humbles the proud and the lowly He raises. Think you're much? Know you're living?" For Dahlberg, who was no stoic and pined for his mother and for the freedom to roam the streets, these seven years confirmed in him the pathology of the abandoned.

It took Dahlberg four years of intensive work (1959–1963), and the aid of four editors, to finish *Because I Was Flesh.* It is not hard to imagine the reason for his difficulty: he did not want to stoke the Oedipal furnace. But he made one of those artistic decisions that are strokes of genius. As he wrote to Jonathan Williams, "I am also using wit to relieve tragedy, and also because I have not the bravery to complete the book that in a way is being composed by my mother, without mining the comic veins. I must walk in comic socks or perish in buskined drama." The "comic socks" were a fortunate purchase, since they afforded him some protection against both his tender feelings toward Lizzie and his grudge against her for his psychic maiming—and relieved his art of the shrill and monotonous diatribes that so often made his previous books brilliant half-ruins. The humor also enabled him periodically to judge her gently; he perceived the pathos and incorrigible romance of her failures. Though she is as eager for marriage as a young woman in Jane Austen's novels, some moral myopia seizes her and she invariably chooses badly, ending up cheated of her savings and, worse, of her hopes. Unlike the other lady barbers, she lacks the hard practicality and relish of hustling that permits them to trade their "lawless flesh" for the respectability of marriage.

As Lizzie grows older, her passion for security and her fear of death increase. The body turns a nasty gray. Dahlberg describes with a touching delicacy her preparations and manners when a new beau comes to call, yet he sees the comic incongruities: Lizzie's courteous set speeches, as if she had taken elocution lessons; her fiddling with her gold-embroidered dress and pince-nez; the cultured way she eats grapes; and her studied fingering of the piano, playing snatches of favorite light classics (to show that she is not ordinary), their lyrics poignantly emblematic of her craving for the beautiful—"Roses kissed by the golden dew" or "Tell me something, tell me true, dear, tell me why you went away." Such refinement is lost on the wizened, miserly men who sized her up as a potential mate, but love and marriage is a game that requires gambling on human character, even if the outcome is an emotional deficit. In these scenes, Mary Magdalene has become the Mater Dolorosa.

The epitome of these sallow, unsexual men is Tobias Emmeritch, who answers an advertisement Lizzie placed in a matrimonial gazette. This funny, complex episode, one of Dahlberg's finest inventions, is Lizzie's last, desperate fling before her death and mystical apotheosis. Though Tobias is a mouthpiece for Dahlberg's most acerb opinions, he lives on the page. This creaky fop and Schopenhauerian cheapskate brings the smell of death in his galoshes and accentuates it with wan flourishes of his ubiquitous umbrella. His nihilistic proverbs are as sour as the pickles with which he has made a fortune; indeed, his contentious garrulity is oddly matched with a decrepit body whose erotic energies, if they ever existed, have run down like a clock. He can only offer Lizzie the shelter of a wheezing romance. Strindberg, "who really abhorred life," is his bedtime reading, so he is appropriately cynical and preposterous while inflicting the last of Lizzie's major marital defeats:

> Besides, why should he heed what she was saying? What had he to do with woman's gaggling? The best conversation is a monologue in which no one

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else can meddle. He renewed his musings: My watchword is prudence. When a female folds you in her arms, she is winding a sheet around you, and knotting it too. Luckily there's no woman who can feast on my jaw, or gnaw my sunken temples, or dig her rotten amorous molar into my joints. I am grateful to admit that I have no marrow, and no wife will ever make a chronicle of my anatomy. No, it is positively clear: a bedfellow is a bailiff, a summons, a foreclosure, a pauper's oath and a hearse.

Lizzie, under no illusions about Tobias, knows he is no cavalier, but just a ridiculous, lonely old miser with "the knack of making money or of turning the worst into the best—while she always managed to turn every advantage into a loss." Although she does not want to be taken for a scheming woman, she tries to inveigle him into making a financial settlement so she can pass her last years in comfort, without needing to call on her son for help. But Tobias is invulnerable to her pleas and wiles. In exasperation, Lizzie asks him, "Why don't you do something with your life besides save it?" but he parries the question with such glum *aperçus* as "Think of having a suit cleaned; anybody with an ounce of intelligence knows that sooner or later it will pour." Lizzie's campaign is conducted with a careful noble formality: "Frankly, I find more honor in being Lizzie Dalberg; it's an educated name, and not common. I was born into my name and I didn't start from nowhere." But although she denounces his fanatical thrift and furtive jealousy with the majestic scorn of Dr. Johnson, she ends, predictably, out in the cold—still defenseless, unprotected. The final irony of this misalliance *manqué* is that, upon his death, the newspaper obituary refers to Tobias as a philanthropist! And he leaves his money to his invalid aged brother and sister.

Dahlberg has cunningly contrived it so that Lizzie's dwindling hopes force her into a close relationship with her son, as though their material and spiritual destinies converged to bring them to the brink of a shared carnage. As if contrite over her earlier neglect, she sacrifices herself and her money for her son's happiness. She beseeches him to be her shield against death, psychologically proposing he be her husband, but he cannot "go to her and kiss the latchets of her torn, grubby boots." They both inhabit a "peopleless desert," a communion of the devastated, yet out of a perverse malice Dahlberg is driven to forsake her, to punish her for abandoning him as a boy. Her unbearable anguish and his sense of being irretrievably wronged are knotted like an umbilical cord that both strangles and gives life.

This remarkable woman, "this five-feet of relentless will," "this shamble of loneliness," for whom "health was beauty" dies alone, her body not discovered for five days (in actuality, her body probably wasn't discovered for two weeks). Dahlberg's explanation is that "all people have the automatic impulse to harm others, and while one is stroking the neck of the beloved he has an involuntary desire to break it." His paralyzed will demonstrates for him the finality of our stricken, fallen natures: character is genetic fate. Our incestuous desires and guilt, our original trauma, like shrapnel in the soul, fester to the end of our days. The myth of recurrence triumphs. "Eros goes as far back as Chaos," Dahlberg tells us. Sex is force, not sentiment, as amorally destructive as Henry Adams's dynamo.

Confession, in autobiography, is a form of sincere equivocation. The author's tone may be complacent or brusque, but it usually implies a mobile self, one that chooses with difficulty among competing selves because, as George Eliot puts it in *Middlemarch*, "Character is a process and unfolding. . . . Character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do." Dahlberg denies this somber faith in change. Man is too stupid to learn. Moral maxims fall on stony spirits, including his own. He cites Thoreau approvingly: "The heart is always inexperienced."

The last chapter of *Because I Was Flesh* surpasses Rousseau's *Confessions* in its imperious solipsism and self-abasement. Instead of trying to exonerate himself of the most cruel acts, Dahlberg flays himself for filial ingratitude, as though he were an incarnation of Goneril and Regan: "It is hideous and coarse to assume that we can do something for others—and it is vile not to endeavor to do it. I had not the strength to handle her

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tragedy, for my will has failed me every hour of each day. It is said that a wise man falls down seven times a day and rises; I have fallen and never gotten up." The inner man cries havoc. Enlightenment is a stab at a truth, the hopeless art of deciphering. Dahlberg fluctuates between placing blame "for making sport" of her life on his own ingrained evil habits, Lizzie's passionate irregularities, and Jehovah.

If "the miracle of perception is bound up with the miracle of love," as Dahlberg claims, he is self-condemned to dwell in the "dungy caves of the Cyclops." And, indeed, Dahlberg's artistic career has drawn sustenance from an absolutist's dogma of impossibilism. Loathing separation, he destroys the intimacy he craves with a violent compulsiveness and lives in "boreal solitude." With his genius for abuse and invective, Dahlberg sees perfidy everywhere, especially on his own heart, and barks at it like Thersites, Timon, Diogenes—and Job. He cannibalizes himself. He is both the dragon—terrorizing himself and the world with its sting of gall, hoarding his treasures of rejection—and a failed Saint George, striking at the monster but not slaying it. "Nobody ever overcomes the phantasms of his childhood. The man is the corrupt dream of the child." This self-fulfilling prophecy universalizes his destitution. It is the moralist's meager solace. The rhetoric is magnificent, but is it true?

Our reason may be deformed and our will enfeebled, and we may be estranged from ourselves as from others, but, as Edwin Muir has remarked, "Without forgiveness our lives would be unimaginable." Fortunately, Dahlberg's art is wiser than his philosophy. For like Muir, he has understood that the imagination is potentially an instrument of immortality. In the twined life of mother and son, he has woven a web as subtle and intricate as the fatal pattern that tied Hippolytus and Phaedra. When "gibing Pilate," the spokesman for the moral average, counters Lizzie's angry question, "Why am I miserable, while others who are pitiless and contemptible are so fortunate?" with the retort, "What is Truth?" and she replies quietly, "My life," the moment is one of the most heartbreaking in all the literature of autobiography.

Through the eloquence of his art, Dahlberg can set aside blame, self-laceration, and misanthropic humor and sing an anthem that bestows upon his mother the blessing of a conciliating grace:

> When the image of her comes up on a sudden—just as my bad demons do—and I see again her dyed henna hair, the eyes dwarfed by the electric lights in the Star Lady Barbershop, and the dear, broken wing of her mouth, and when I regard her wild tatters, I know that not even Solomon in his lilied raiment was so glorious as my mother in her rags. *Selah.*

This rapturous prose, the rise and fall and swelling of ecstatic revelation, and the intoning of the Psalmist's mysterious cadence bring aesthetic concord and a measure of peace to his wounded ego. His Oedipal obsessions have been subdued in the grandeur of reattachment, for he has finally been able to reassemble the image of his mother, which eluded him in the orphanage, in his wanderings, and in most of his books. *Because I Was Flesh* is Dahlberg's greatest act of expiation. The flesh may rot and perish, but the life of Lizzie Dahlberg cannot. Although society be as absent—or as much a bystander—as Saul Gottdank, in his art Dahlberg found the Cave of Machpelah and its long-sought conferral of identity. He found his name in writing Lizzie's epitaph.

"Aesthetics is a style of living, enunciation—and affectation," Dahlberg has said. The sheer flaunting artifice, the deliberate archaizing of his style, have stirred controversy and antipathy. Critics have derided him as an American Euphues, a poseur given to rodomontade. There is truth in these charges, but they miss the point because his style is consonant with his moral vision. Despising the pedants, he became a ferocious compiler of literary texts, fables, and aphorisms. An autodidact, he offers lessons in the anthropological customs of primitive men, usually deemed superior to "civilized" men—a small group of savants is exempt from Dahlberg's strictures against the modern world—because they are not separated from nature and their testicles do not drive them mad—or at least much less so. Like Herodotus, Dahlberg is fascinated by odd customs, bits of natural lore. The clear

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contours of barbaric kings or eccentric sages appeal to his adversary imagination; they keep fresh his sense of wonder amid his moral disgust, and become partners in his attack on the world's canting self-deceptions.

Dahlberg's style, though willfully invented, is a necessary outgrowth of his sense of self. Herbert Read, whose poised mind and sensible advocacy were a curious foil to Dahlberg's oracular stridencies, justly called him "a druid, hissing his imprecations into the dusty track of the marauder." His style is a flamboyant procession of words, the verbal equivalent, say, of one of Montezuma's rituals. It is expensive but clear even when he succumbs to a bout of tedious harangue. Dahlberg's defense is characteristic: "Long ago I resolved to be, like Crates, a jocose iconoclast, to see whatever my eyes compelled me to regard without blinking the worst by calling it the best, and to accept my hindrances as the founts of any perceptions I may be lucky enough to discover."

But this rationale and its dependence on random inspirations cannot cancel the fact that Dahlberg often wears blinkers. His petty side is not pretty to watch. His vigilance to expose and correct error turns him into a vigilante. He engages, for example, in *ad hominem* arguments and specious polemics; he will quote Henry James's worst passages and ignore the formal perfection of the master's best; and he does not deign to refute logical critical objections. Spiteful and jealous, he has cultivated the art of denigration, as if by fiat he could demolish the truths of his artistic siblings and thus remove the threat to his aesthetic identity. His stylistic excesses are the orphan's pugnacious defense.

All of Dahlberg's writings have been autobiographical. In his apprentice days, he followed uncritically the conventions of the naturalistic novel. The narratives of *Bottom Dogs* (1930), *From Flushing to Calvary* (1932), and *Those Who Perish* (1934) are oppressively literal, dazed transcripts of brutalized experiences, "consciousness in a state of repulsion," as D. H. Lawrence said of *Bottom Dogs*. The language of that book is bare of mythical adornments, a flat morose voice moving over the terrain of memory, never straying from its tone of inert defeat, as the hero, Lorry Lewis, wanders across America. There is no connection among characters, just a drab amnesia, the stylistic counterpart of the Great Depression. Although the facts are the same as in *Because I Was Flesh,* the emotionally numbed center occurs in the lengthy recital of his seven years at the Jewish Orphan Asylum, which is condensed to one chapter in the autobiography. Mistreated by the authorities, given skimpy, rancid food, no affection, and a heavy dose of hypocritical piety, the boys band together in the scrappy camaraderie of the forlorn. The asylum is a soulless, regimented place, a psychic Gehenna that formulizes Dahlberg's sense of being set apart. His subsequent adventures on the road as he drifts across a faceless America, from marginal jobs to a hobo's life, are a chronicle of mechanical survival.

Lorry's relationship with his mother is presented from a cold distance. Lizzie is merely a credulous, sour, hard-working woman, lost in vague reveries. She has no presence. Probably because Dahlberg had not begun to sort out his angry feelings for her, he muffled them and concentrated on the boy's life in the streets.

A comparison of two passages about the girls who were employed by Lizzie illustrates the difference in style:

Bottom Dogs:
The girls, too, who worked for her were a trial. They were easygoing young kids from Wichita, Kansas City or St. Joseph, Missouri who wanted to learn a trade and become city flirts. They wanted to be fast and to know how to take care of themselves in a tough town. She took them in, taught them the trade, lent them money when they were down on their backs, and when they got back on their feet again they'd primp up, run off with some well-perfumed guy who took dope or take a job in a competitive shop across the street because they thought it was closer to Walnut Street.

Because I Was Flesh:
Experienced lady barbers were now available. Often down and out, they came to Lizzie for work, and she would lend them money and take them in as free lodgers until they were on their feet. Among these was Gladys, who had Indian blood and a large bun of chestnut hair. She was a great drawing card for the shop. Emma Moneysmith, a Mormon with legs that quivered like a drawn bow, had the second chair; her boy, Marion, took violin lessons. The third was Miss Taylor's, whose son,

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Noah, had the sexual habits of Ham. He claimed that Tisha, the daughter of the prostitute who kept light-housekeeping rooms above Basket's Lunchroom, had put a love potion in his cup of coffee. Sally Muhlebach, a good hairdresser but too seedy to bait trade, served the fourth chair. Her nine-year-old girl, Gizella, had ballooned, dropsical legs and once when she and Lizzie's boy were at the flat together, she told him some of the dark secrets of pleasure while fingering the keys on the Bach upright piano in the parlor so that none of the girl roomers could hear her. . . .

The prose of *Bottom Dogs* has a "sapless complexion." It is as riveting as one of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science tracts. The girls suffer from the ultimate Dahlbergian indignity: they have no name, no body, therefore no vivacious identity. The author parcels out information as if he were giving street directions to a stranger, betraying no feeling. He cannot carry a tune. The rhythm is slack, the rhetoric minimal, neutered, reductive, its dullness the "sign of a weak and stingy imagination." In contrast, the prose of the autobiography is expansive, droll, animated, physical; the author shares his knowledge and enjoyment of the "dark secrets of pleasure," improvising with a few deft images, while fingering the keys, the delicious, surreptitious, or brazen music of sex. The love potion has turned nearly everybody's head and legs; the girls are named and have children. Dahlberg's style has body and a robust flavor spiked with wormwood.

Dahlberg himself came to consider his early novels as mediocre manipulations of his childhood and young manhood, disfigured by self-pity—in short, dreary imitations of proletarian naturalism. He has repudiated them and refuses to reread them. In *The Flea of Sodom* (1950), Dahlberg describes his radical shift away from the linguistic void and gibbering of robots that he says marked much of the fiction and discourse of the thirties. He drastically revamped his style. His new ideal is expressed in a letter to Robert Hutchens: "A writer should employ a language that can pierce the heart or awaken the mind. Style ought to have some kinship with mountains, glens, furrows, orchards, if it is to have a symbolic and human value."

To this end he rethought the role of the artist, shearing it of any overt political functions. "Art is sorcery," and the artist a hierophant ministering to the needs of the community with magical formulas, chants, and moral adages. Above all, he is a centaur guarding and adding to the stock of a nation's myths by which it learns who and what it is. This task was particularly crucial for America, whose myths and legends had been neglected, or forgotten, or never acquired. Dahlberg thus recast himself as La Salle, Cabeza de Vaca, and William Bartram, solitary explorers willing to track the headwaters for samples of our autochthonous roots. In renouncing history, that cluttered record of bloody and wasteful events, in favor of fable and prehistory, whose revivifying waters are "a surety of man's sanity," he converted his isolation into a virtue. In other words, he started making "a marvelous mask" and found a style manufactured half from the honey of books and half from his own venomous wit.

The new style emerged fully caparisoned in *Can These Bones Live* (1940). The title is exemplary: in a series of acrid, biblical, Brownean essays, he examines the American tradition and selects his own (narrow) usable past: Bartram, Thoreau, Melville, Sherwood Anderson, Dreiser. For the first time, he plays the *enfant terrible,* smashing idols with exhilarating swipes of the pen—and he indulges his love of pithy and provoking opinions. In the books that came out in the years before he began writing *Because I Was Flesh* in 1959—*The Flea of Sodom, The Sorrows of Priapus* (1957)—he refined his style and continued his didactic buccaneering: "like a Grand Inquisitor," Read gently remarked to Dahlberg, "you would send to the stake any author who in any respect offends your dogma." *The Flea of Sodom* is so violently turgid in its debunking of left wing attitudes—it is a private exorcism of old political demons and a purge of thirties' apparatchiks—that it verges in incoherence.

Yet for all its superfluities, Dahlberg's baroque style has extraordinary energy, its bookishness balanced by a racy humor, its erudition as beautiful as carved lithic objects. And it suits the inner man, whose planetary influences were so extreme. After all, he has had only one story to tell, so that one should

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not seek any more variety in his moral injunctions or his stiff-necked cries against the stiff necked—he packs the modern world off to hell with as much skill as Dante's Cerberus—than in a hammer striking an anvil.

Dahlberg's style achieves consummate greatness in *Because I Was Flesh*. And his imagination flourishes with a chaste ornateness. Sublimation and the sublime are cognates. There is no need for the disarmingly casual explanation of why he wrote the book: "I have nothing better to do with my life than to write a book and perhaps nothing worse. . . . If this book is a great defect, then let it be; for I have come to that time in my life when it is absolutely important for me to compose a good memoir although it is a negligible thing if I fail." Why? To empty his "sack of woe" once more? To cry *mea culpa* when his psychological premise is that guilt is preordained? For unlike Saint Augustine, he does not find salvation in a system of truth it is his mission to expound to other men. Saint Augustine and Monica, Edward Dahlberg and Lizzie—one a parable of psychological integration, the other of confusion and partial transcendence.

Dahlberg tries to repair his broken world with mythic plumbing. He extends the boundaries of his purview from Kansas City to the heights of Lake Titicaca, as if his long pilgrimage in search of his origins forced him back against the stream of time to the child's dreams and the troglodytic world of the unconscious. The quotations from his favorite authors, his authoritative geographers of the spirit, are his lost father giving voice to, and glossing, the text of his torn life. The older man (and the better writer) of this private anthology rules with ironic scepter the reconstructed peonage of memory (again the parallel with Saint Augustine is startling).

The Word is Dahlberg's redeemer. In becoming flesh, it grants self-mastery. He no longer need "Be on guard against the world" all the time; words guide his feelings to a taut harmony. Language may be "as unreasonable as life," but in *Because I Was Flesh,* Dahlberg imbues it with heroic assurance—it is often all that stands between him and a dour capitulation to nihilism, that "ineradicable infamy." The profligacy of language, unlike that of sex, sustains him and enables him to overcome the vehement, coercive ideology he nursed from childhood. Words become his loving, nurturing parents, and *Because I Was Flesh* the wanted "song of desire."

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BOOKS

Clio and the Changing Fashions

Some Patterns in Current American Historiography

MICHAEL KAMMEN

As the general mood of the mid-1970s is very much altered from what it was at the end of the 1960s, so too the contours of historical thought and scholarship during the past six years have been strikingly different from those of the decade 1960-1969. C. Vann Woodward perceived in 1969 a "growing anti-historical bias in contemporary culture," but by the early months of 1974 the number one best seller in fiction was Gore Vidal's *Burr*, while in nonfiction it was Alistair Cooke's *America*. Can the change be understood simply in terms of a shift from cynical realism and "relevance" to nostalgic escapism? In part, perhaps; but it must also be understood against a background of aroused public curiosity about our national origins, as well as historians' deepening sensitivity to what Edmund Burke once called "the causes of our present discontents."

We might fruitfully begin by comparing two compilations of the most significant books about American history published during the past fifteen years. The first list is derived from a broad and careful survey of practicing historians (conducted by Cornelius Eringaard, "Historians' History, 1960-1969," Ed.D. dissertation, Ball State University, 1972), who were asked which books they personally rated highest in quality, which had the greatest scholarly impact, and which were most widely used in the classroom. Their top sixteen choices, all published between 1960 and 1968, appear on the following page.

We do not yet have a comparable survey based upon similarly circulated questionnaires for the period 1969-1974. I have, however, polled a substantial number of representative historians, and the result is a suggestive compilation of sixteen books that are at least *among* the most significant works about American history published during the last half-dozen years.

Certain continuities in the two lists are readily apparent. Books that attempt broad-gauge synthesis and reinterpretation appear on both. Racial tensions and the institution of slavery remain cynosures of attention. Methodological innovation continues to be appreciated, as are books shaped by particular ideologies, political or personal. Yet the differences between the two lists are much more striking than the similarities, and deserving of our attention.

To begin with, there appears to have been a declining concern with traditional political history—the narratives of public institutions, officials, and their competition for power. This trend is accompanied by a notable awakening of interest in social history, but social history that no longer means what it meant to G. M. Trevelyan half a century ago: "The history of a people with the politics left out." In contemporary historiography, social

MICHAEL KAMMEN received the Pulitzer Prize for American history in 1973. He is chairman of the history department at Cornell University.

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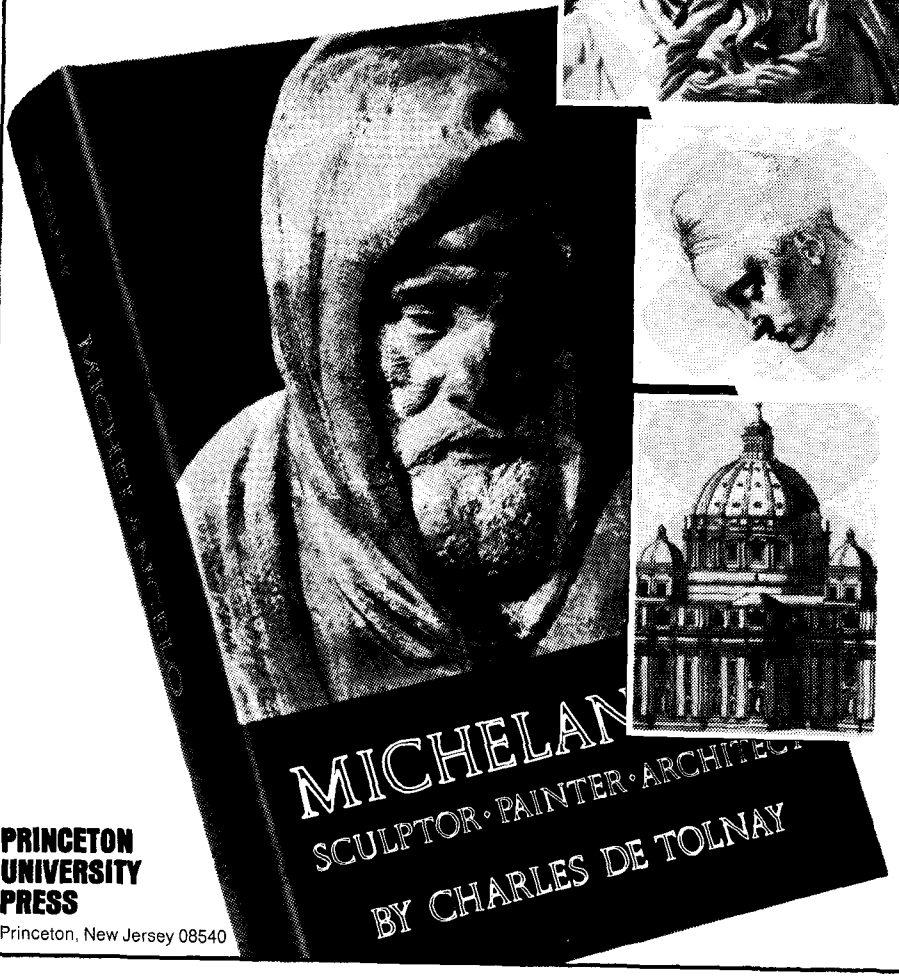

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SIGNIFICANT BOOKS IN AMERICAN HISTORY PUBLISHED 1960–1968

C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (1960).
Eric L. McKitrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (1960).
William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (1961).
Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (1961).
David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (1961).
Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1962).
Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (1963).
William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (1963).
Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (1963).
Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (1964).
Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (1965).
Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (1965).
Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (1965).
Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1965/1967).
Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (1967).
Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968).

SIGNIFICANT BOOKS IN AMERICAN HISTORY, PUBLISHED 1969–1974

Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969).
Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1969).
Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years. Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (1970).
Philip Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (1970).
John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (1970).
Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (1971).
Gabriel and Joyce Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (1972).
James Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (1972).
Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (1972).
David M. Potter, *History and American Society* (1973).
Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973).
Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (1973).
Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (1973).
Robert W. Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1974).
Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974).
Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974).

history has come to focus on the examination of changes in social structure, mobility, bonds of community, social order and disorder, intergenerational relationships, the history of the family, and childhood. Even the so-called "new political history," with its emphasis upon ethno-religious allegiances and demographic descriptions of localities as a means of explaining voting behavior or partisan conflict, has become, in effect, a subcategory of social history. As Richard L. McCormick has recently written, "The most unfavorable thing there is to say about the ethno-cultural school is that its members have not pursued their own fine insights far enough. Unless political history becomes a subdivision of social history, it is important to specify precisely how cultural identifications become politically salient, and to face squarely the question of what, if anything, mobilizing voters has to do with making policies."

Although both cultural and intellectual history (the history of ideas) remain popular, these modes of inquiry—so widely pursued and characteristic of the quarter-century following World War II—may very well have peaked in 1968 and 1969 with the appearance of two stunning volumes: Winthrop D.

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Jordan's *White over Black,* a brilliant history of the origins of racial prejudice, and Gordon Wood's fine *The Creation of the American Republic,* an examination of emerging American political theory between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Since 1969, creative energies of the kind that were once channeled into the dissection of determinative attitudes and ideas have been applied to the history of American society.

One special feature of this shift has been the blossoming and legitimizing of the case study as a respectable, indeed a historiographically avant-garde, endeavor. For more than a century, the writing of local and family history was considered the domain of antiquarians, genealogists, filiopietists, and retired admirals—of the DAR and the DAV. Now dozens of Ph.D. dissertations are done each year on this town, that county, or on families in general and in particular. The telescope having given way to the microscope, American historians are examining smaller units of society in greater detail than ever before.

A growing interest in "material history," in historical archaeology, in the history of objects and architecture has also arisen, both as an expression of cultural aspiration and as a symptom of cultural change. As Neil Harris puts it in the preface to his widely used series, *The American Culture,* "Forgotten institutions, buried artifacts, and outgrown experiences are included in these books, along with some of the sights and sounds that reflected the changing character of American life."

Increased attention to the history of native Americans and of Indian-white relations has been salutary, too, both because of the relative neglect these areas of inquiry have traditionally suffered and because of the interdisciplinary advances that have made possible a more sophisticated approach to them. During the last five years, historians seem suddenly to have discovered anthropology as well as ethnohistory and now borrow, shamelessly yet effectively, from the conceptual cupboards of these disciplines. The works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz are most frequently cited, and especially Geertz's influential essay, "Ideology as a Cultural System."

This growing tendency to borrow concepts and techniques, both from the social sciences and from literary criticism and art history, reveals a rising self-consciousness about the philosophy of history and, even more, about the problems of historical methodology. A highly vocal cluster of people within the profession now exists whose principal interest is the study of methodology itself. As Gene Wise, a leader of this group, puts it in his recent book, *American Historical Explanations* (1973): "a historical explanation is distinguished not so much by its content as by its form." Cecil F. Tate, another member, believes that "danger " lies in "unstated and unexamined methodological assumptions"; and so he has just produced a book, *The Search for Method in American Studies* (1974), designed to make implicit procedures more systematic.

Interestingly, two of the most controversial issues among historians during the early and mid-1960s—whether or not psychological criteria and quantitative methods should be applied to historical scholarship—are now largely passé. They have become so partly because their advocates are getting less strident in their claims and partly because a new generation of historians has come of age, with the special stock of computers and couches already available when needed. In much of recent historical scholarship, computer hardware and psychiatric furniture are taken for granted.

In this connection, Robert W. Fogel, the best known among contemporary "cliometricians," made an extraordinary statement during a recent public lecture. "The writing of *Time on the Cross,*" he confessed, "has been a chastening experience for us. . . . We have come to recognize that history is, and very likely will remain, primarily a humanistic discipline. We now believe that the issue raised by historical quantifiers is not whether history can be transformed into social science, but the realm of usefulness of social science methods in a humanistic discipline."

Such statements are disarming enough to most inveterate opponents of innovation, and are compounded by whispers that we have always made quantitative and psychological

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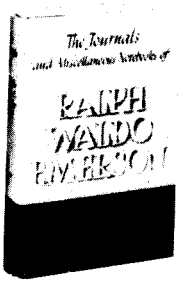

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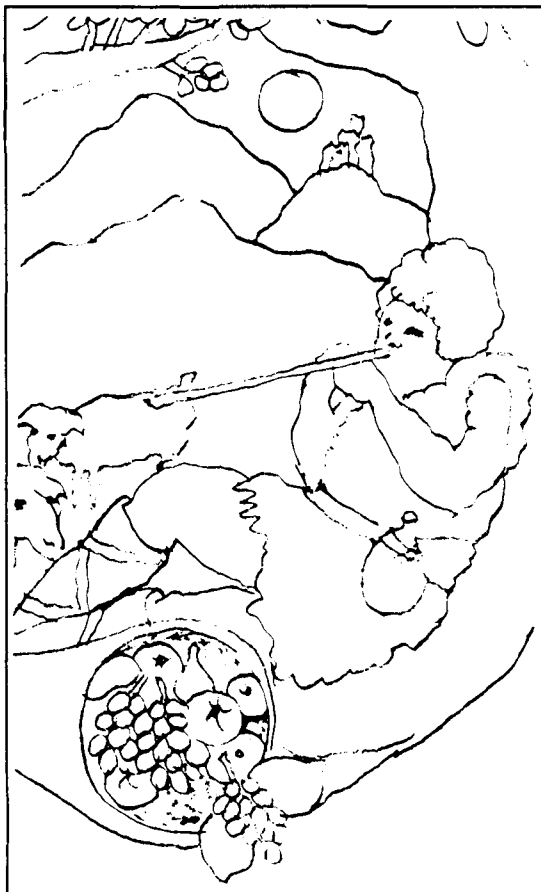

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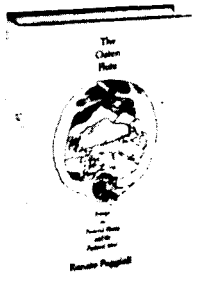

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judgments about the past anyway. In yet another very recent address, Fogel has said: "Mathematics has long been an intrinsic feature of historical analysis, but it has been covert and subliminal. That is because many issues which turn crucially on quantitative dimensions are disguised by words—do not become apparent because they are put forward in words instead of in numbers or equations."

Putting the case for psychohistory, Erik H. Erikson, in *Dimensions of a New Identity: The 1973 Jefferson Lectures in the Humanities* (1974), has remarked:

> Psychohistory, essentially, is the study of individual and collective life with the combined methods of psychoanalysis and history. In spite of, or because of, the very special and conflicting demands made on the practitioners of these two fields, bridgeheads must be built on each side in order to make a true span possible. But the completed bridge should permit unimpeded two-way traffic; and once this is done, history will simply be history again, but now a history aware of the fact that it has always indulged in a covert and circuitous traffic with psychology which can now be direct, overt, and aware.

It is ironic, then, that the most recent and eloquent opposition to psychohistory and quantification comes from a very distinguished historian of culture who also agrees that practitioners have always used these techniques. But Jacques Barzun's new book, *Clio and the Doctors* (1974), contends that when the psychohistorian attempts to explain a personality like Hitler's, he adds little to what we knew when we merely described that personality in detail, and that psychohistory is problematic because it is mechanistic and deterministic: "events and agents lose their individuality and become illustrations of certain automatisms."

Barzun raises some important issues in his challenge to the "doctors." He suggests that in psychobiography there is a tendency toward selective concentration upon certain personal facts to the neglect of others; that the authors of such works rely upon materials that are incomplete, and upon methods—such as symbol and analogy—that are indirect; that minds may be understood through other means than depth psychology; and that psychohistory lacks methodological rigor because so often it involves "little more than the use of a suggestive comparison."

Ultimately, however, Professor Barzun may spoil his brief by revealing what could be regarded as old-fashioned prejudices about what written history is, or ought to be, at its best. He seems to prefer the narrative mode, which he is entitled to do; but he also assumes that the historian's task is to tell *what* happened, even more than to explain why it happened or what its effects might have been.

He has a rather romantic notion, at least in my view, of the "genuine" historian's *modus operandi:* that the "common" historian doesn't have much of a problem with bias, that his facts and "truths" are readily ascertainable, and that his "actual" events are utterly different in kind from numerical or psychological phenomena. Barzun believes that a historical fact derived from a literary source is more reliable than one drawn from a census, a parish register, or a voting record—a belief that perplexed me until Barzun permitted his own (apparently elitist) angle of vision to appear. He is explicitly contemptuous of "the laborious search through archives for the deeds of the many. The mass age needs mass premises and conclusions."

What may be bothering a few intransigent doyens, then, is that the practice (if not the nature) of historical scholarship is, very simply, changing. Explicit value judgments, which were anathema back in the days of so-called "scientific" and "objective" history, are now very much in vogue. Indeed, it is the historians closest to the social sciences—the cliometricians, the diplomatists and historians of United States foreign policy, the historians of warfare and of race—who are most commonly given to moralizing in their work and who, as a part of their explicitly ideological approach, contend that the historian has an important role to play as moral critic.

Like the social sciences, moreover, articles in learned historical journals have gained as much influence as full-scale books, and often more. The second list of significant books, 1969-1974, is somewhat misleading in that it camouflages the extraordinary contribution

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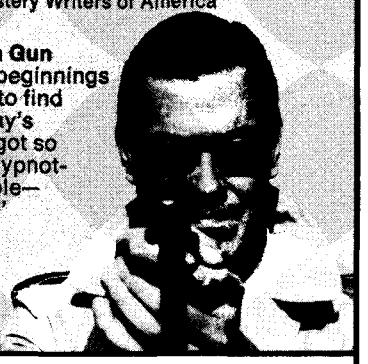

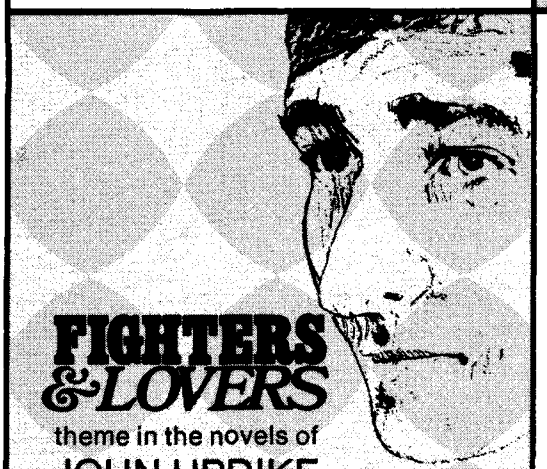

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made by briefer but nonetheless truly seminal essays published during this period: by John Higham on the phasing of historical thought in America; by Ann Douglas and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in women's history; by John Shy on the social implications of military history; by Herbert Gutman on the laboring classes in nineteenth-century America; by Samuel P. Hays on the political dimensions of social change since the 1880s; and by Edmund S. Morgan on the work ethic and economic growth during the first generation at Jamestown. These pieces represent some of the most exciting work being done in the profession today. The layman, unfortunately, can get at them conveniently only in anthologies stitched together for use in college courses, and by then the essays are already four or five years old. Like good wine, they keep well enough. The problem is that our tastes tend to vacillate periodically.

The practice of historical scholarship is changing in yet another way: collaboration is becoming far more common than it once was. *Time on the Cross,* by Fogel and Engerman, is only the most sensational example. A better book, perhaps, and one likely to be of more enduring value, is *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (1974), by Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, an impressive study of industrial conflict and the organization of workers based upon computer analyses of more than one hundred thousand strikes. The collaboration of these authors, like that of Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum in *Salem Possessed,* suggests that two heads are sometimes more than twice as good as one alone. As Boyer and Nissenbaum put it in the preface to their innovative inquiry into the social origins of witchcraft: "There remain no chapters, no paragraphs, hardly a sentence even, that one or the other of us would be able to claim as his 'property.' We would like to consider the book the product of an exploration into the possibilities of cooperative scholarship, an attempt to reduce somewhat the intellectual and emotional toll so often exacted by solitary academic labor. *Salem Possessed* would probably never have been written except as a collaboration; in any case, we believe it to be a better book than either of us could have produced alone."

More than ever before, historians are becoming aware of their interdependence, and of their dependence upon computers, special resources, and even, in some instances, students. It is increasingly difficult, certainly, to imagine a great work being written in a prison cell, the way Fernand Braudel wrote his masterpiece, *The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949), in a German jail during World War II; or the great Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, produced his stunning history of early Europe under similar circumstances during World War I. Such "splendid isolation" seems literally (as well as figuratively) a thing of the past. For better or worse, historians now seem to require a great deal in the way of special resources and support services.

Paradoxically, historians may very well be on the verge of regaining the broad reading public that they enjoyed in this country between the 1830s and the 1920s. Now that the novel is into lean days, if not in fact an impoverished genre, history may well supplant it as the major written source of entertainment, instruction, and artistic satisfaction. In his famous essay, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), Henry James saw fiction displacing history as *the* absorbing diversion. It is possible to envision the reverse now happening—note, as an instance, Norman Mailer's subtitle to *The Armies of the Night:* "History as a Novel: The Novel as History"—and this for many reasons:

- First, the rapidity of social change in our time seems to increase our hunger for historical knowledge. Indeed, the rapidity of change conflates past-into-present so swiftly that life itself seems to be a "becoming," and thereby the very stuff of history.
- Second, the truth of modern life so often seems stranger than fiction anyway, and our experiences of the past decade have made contemporary history seem unusually susceptible to moral criticism, which was, of course, a traditional function of the novel.
- Third, history, like fiction, can be a form of social documentation; but it surpasses the novel in helping us to distinguish *explicitly* between ephemeral phenomena, on the one hand, and enduring or consequential phenomena, on the other. Increasingly we seem to require assistance in separating tradition from

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trash, necessary artifacts from superficial artifices.

• Fourth, the legitimizing of local studies once again gives historical writing those identifiable particularities of time, place, and persons that have long been the benchmarks of fiction.

• And finally, as America finishes its fourth full century of history, we are less vulnerable than ever before to the old caustic charge that we have no history. Rather, like Walt Whitman, we have by now embraced it all: innocence and guilt, homogeneity and diversity, a colonial condition and an imperial status, the primitive and the postindustrial, cultural creativity and destructiveness, grandeur and tragedy.

What, then, lies on the horizon for American historiography? What will the near future of historical writing be like? What will we be reading, say, between now and 1985? Several of the basic tendencies of the past decade will surely continue to be influential.

Books about intellectual paradigms, modes and models of thought, what the French call the history of *mentalités,* are likely to continue to appear, still under the tremendous impact of such works as *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* by Thomas S. Kuhn, and *The Machine in the Garden,* by Leo Marx. Books about social structure, class, upward and downward mobility, intergenerational relationships, and family history will also continue to be fashionable. Books about economic growth and decline, as well as about the implications of both, will rise in importance—especially if our current recession deepens into something worse. The works of four of our best urban and business historians, senior scholars of great originality—works not so well known to the general public as they should be—figure to gain a broader readership: Alfred D. Chandler's *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Enterprise* (1962), Thomas C. Cochran's *Business in American Life: A History* (1972), James Willard Hurst's *Law and Economic Growth* (1964) and *The Legitimacy of the Business Corporation* (1970), and Sam Bass Warner, Jr.'s *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (1972), among others.

Although the New Left revisionists of the 1960s now seem to have shot their bolt, sensitive historians will continue to use the past as a means of offering critiques of the present, and vice versa. History, as Martin Duberman has urged, will be written from more personal perspectives. Such perspectives will undoubtedly be especially strong in ethnic and labor history, popular culture, and the history of blacks, American Indians, and women.

As for techniques of investigation and exposition, a growing use of and respectability for oral history can be foreseen. Merle Miller's *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (1973) has added immeasurably to our understanding of that man, just as *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw,* by Theodore Rosengarten (1974), has contributed an exciting new dimension to black, agricultural, and Southern history during the middle third of this century.

Closer scrutiny of iconographic evidence can also be expected, with historians paying more and more attention to paintings, portraits, cartoons, photographic archives, urban plans, and film history. What is called the history of human geography—environmental history, demography, man's changing relationship to the land and seascapes—will receive added attention, too, although it is important to note here that half a century ago Frederick Jackson Turner established most of the ground rules for writing about human geography. True, he failed to go very far beyond the ground rules himself, so that many of his heirs are not even aware of what they owe to his legacy. One of the telling criticisms voiced by older scholars like Jacques Barzun is that the young Turks are so often oblivious to their distinguished predecessors. Just as Turner anticipated the new historical geographers, and Charles A. Beard four decades ago anticipated the New Left critique of United States foreign policy, so Marcus W. Jernegan, Marcus Lee Hansen, Theodore Blegen, and Oscar Handlin wrote the "history of the inarticulate" back in the 1930s and 1940s—before it came to be so called and, one might add, so fashionable.

One final thought on new directions. Comparative history is beginning to come into its own: the cross-cultural examination of slave

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systems, revolutions, peasant societies, political elites, bureaucracies, and the process of modernization provide a few examples. As the works of foreign historians become better known in this country—such as those of E. J. Hobsbawm, Alan MacFarlane, George Rudé, and J. G. A. Pocock—our national history will be written within less parochial boundaries and from less provincial perspectives.

Even the question of our national character—so eagerly discussed during the 1940s and 1950s but discarded, by and large, after that—is apparently being revitalized. David M. Potter, one of the most original and stimulating American historians of the post-World War II generation, helped to keep a small fire burning during the 1960s with his provocative essays on "American Women and the American Character," "The Quest for the National Character," and several other related themes. But those who have done the most to rejuvenate interest in the national character historically considered are Daniel Bell and Erik H. Erikson, a sociologist and a psychiatrist. In 1968 Bell published a little essay entitled "National Character Revisited: A Proposal for Renegotiating the Concept," which concluded with these summary remarks:

> If one is to distinguish between personality configuration and the values, styles, and imagoes of a country as influences which in one way or another shape individual responses, then the idea of modal personality types can serve as the ground for the dimension of *character* in the idea of national character. But if one also seeks to maintain the idea of the *nation* as a meaningful unit of a sociocultural pattern, then one cannot eschew the examination of the national creed, imagoes, style, and consciousness as components of the cultural pattern. It is in this effort, perhaps, by searching out the interplay between personality and the components I have sought to specify, that we might yet be able to find some viable meaning in the ambiguous phrase "national character."

Since then, several interpretive works seeking to explore our national origins and explain our distinctive attributes have appeared, most notably Neil Harris's eight-volume series, *The American Culture* (1970-1973), my own *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (1972), and Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973).

Do we have a usable past? More than three centuries ago, in 1672, the Reverend Thomas Shepard wrote this to his son, who had just been admitted to Harvard College: "Read some histories often, which (they say) make men wise as poets make witty; both which are pleasant things in the midst of more difficult studies." And at the close of the American Revolution, when Thomas Jefferson set out to devise a model curriculum for schools in a republican society, he placed historical studies at the very core of that curriculum: "History, by apprizing them of the past, will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views."

In the subsequent two centuries, however, we somehow seem to have lost faith and to have become a present-minded nation of cynics. Henry James left the United States for England because, among other things, he felt so poignantly the lack of a usable past here. In 1918, Van Wyck Brooks, the critic and historian of American culture, contended that we desperately needed a new and usable past.

It just might be a sign of the times that we have not heard much of that phrase, "a usable past," in the last five years. By 1969, following a decade of overuse, it had become a cliché, more banal than benign; today we are more likely to be told that we must respect "the pastness of the past," which means to accept the past on its own terms rather than to transmogrify it into our own contemporary frame of reference. A proper respect for the integrity of lives and times gone by is a major step toward true historical understanding. So also is the realization that we must not attempt to make *too much sense* of the past. It was, after all, as nonrational at times as is the present.

"What seest thou else," asks Prospero in *The Tempest,* "In the dark backward and

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abysm of time?" Our proper answer ought to be: not ourselves but our forebears. Clio may change *her* clothes, but those quaint people in the family photograph album cannot change theirs. By allowing them to retain their special identity, we are more likely to discover our own—and, in the bargain, our destinies as well.

Politics and Historical Criticism

VERSIONS OF THE PAST. The Historical Imagination in American Fiction. *By Harry B. Henderson III. Oxford. $12.50.*

Reviewed by PETER SHAW

Since D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* in 1923, the best books about American literature typically have followed Lawrence by offering striking new theories and reevaluations. The titles of these works suggest their authors' readiness to identify *the* great period or to define *the* controlling characteristic of American literature: *The Golden Day* (1926), *American Renaissance* (1941), *The American Adam* (1955), *Symbolism and American Literature* (1953), *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957). Recently, Quentin Anderson's *The Imperial Self* (1971) has carried on the tradition even though it attacks both the free, self-sufficient American hero and his champions among the critics. The day for such discussions, though, seems to be coming to an end. It stands to reason that a literature containing no more than a handful of important works can sustain only a limited number of revolutionary rereadings.

On the other hand, a good deal remains to be understood in at least two areas of inquiry: first, the connections between the American Puritans and their nineteenth-century literary descendents; second, the nature of what the late Harry B. Henderson called in his subtitle "The Historical Imagination in American Fiction." Following Sir Walter Scott, American writers—among them Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and Mark Twain—frequently set their books in the past. One key to their meanings, Henderson is able to show, lies in their departures from the historical record. Another key lies in the way the politics and ideas of their times influenced their views of the past. Henderson is at his best, it seems to me, when supplying these historical and intellectual contexts for nineteenth-century books. He shows how the novelists resembled and differed from their contemporaries among the historians, and argues that the distinction between progressive and conservative schools of historical writing may be extended to the novelists.

But *Versions of the Past* attempts much more than an account and analysis of the historical provenance of a group of novels. It offers a theory of the American historical novel based on Marxist critical models. According to Henderson, the American novel exhibits a triumph of progressivism comparable to George Lukács's proto-revolutionary triumph of realism in the European novel. James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne laid the groundwork by criticizing the conservative outlook. Later, progressivism took its rise in Melville and Mark Twain, to culminate in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage,* which provided a progressive legacy for Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, Thomas Pynchon, and Ralph Ellison. The presence of the avowedly conservative Faulkner in this list gives some idea of the conceptual problems arising from the special use of terms in this difficult but rewarding book.

In fact, Henderson substitutes for "conservative" the term "holist," which eventually comes to mean traditionalism, rigidity, gentility, and even antirevolutionary sentiment. Henderson praises the holist imagination for grasping society as a whole and for comprehending the subtlety of personal relationships. As examples, he singles out the historian William Prescott and novelists from Cooper to John Barth. In contrast, progressivism tends toward unsatisfactory characterizations and too easy justification of unsavory events. Despite the

PETER SHAW teaches at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. His book, *The Character of John Adams,* will be published later this year.

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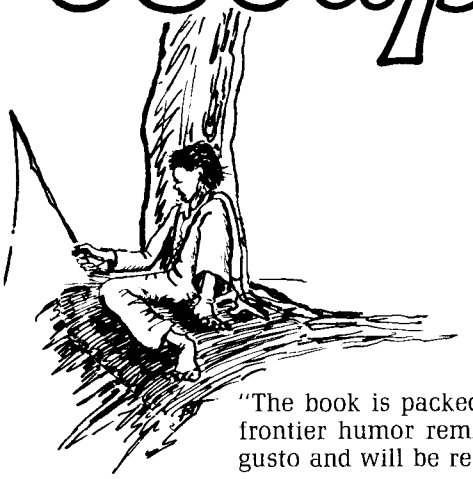

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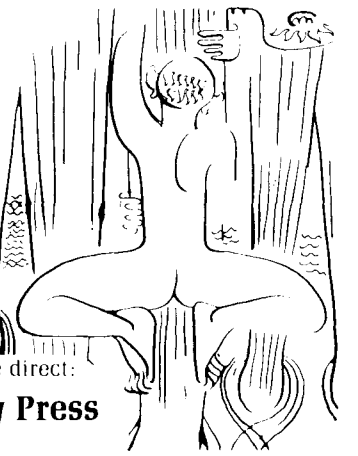

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contrast, Henderson prefers progressivism because, regardless of its conceptual or literary failings, its "function"—"covertly during the nineteenth century, overtly since the penetration of Marxian ideas"—has been to prepare one "to see the status quo upset." Hence, whatever the ostensible politics of an author—Melville's, for example, which were explicitly antirevolutionary—he may be regarded as progressive if his work can be shown to step along the Marxist path of history. Nor does it matter that each of the writers discussed by Henderson moved away from, rather than toward, progressivism. Like the nineteenth-century historians who, as he shows, favored writing about either the rise or the fall of civilizations according to their progressive or conservative leanings, Henderson is addicted to the *rise* of progressivism.

This is not to say that Henderson is a vulgar Marxist. If my account of his argument makes him seem so, I should explain that he does not insist unduly on the rise of literary progressivism. Indeed, the reviewers appear not to have noticed that Henderson has a political thesis at all. Nevertheless, however attenuated, political bias in a book as intelligent as Henderson's raises questions about the relationship among politics, history, and literary criticism. Marxists generally are credited with bringing historical awareness to art. But the peculiar ahistoricity of Henderson's study of historical fiction suggests that what Marxism brings to literature is not history but simply a political bias. At least this is the case with Henderson's discussion of Melville's two tales of shipboard revolt, "Benito Cereno" and *Billy Budd*.

"Benito Cereno" is based on an actual account, while the officers in *Billy Budd* are influenced by their knowledge of an actual revolt put down by Admiral Horatio Nelson. With impressive literary-historical scholarship, Henderson explores these sources better than anyone has before. But, to bring Melville to the progressive side, Henderson turns from history to what he terms "image cluster" analysis. This approach, it is true, has been favored by critics identifying themselves as political radicals. Yet it is hardly historical and hardly new. It amounts simply to gathering the allusions connected with a character in order to describe the impression of him built up by his author. It is the sort of thing that critics have done for generations with Milton's Satan, for example. Henderson, at pains to dismiss the standard critical parallel between the moral dilemmas of *Billy Budd* and *Paradise Lost,* reintroduces the very critical method whose conclusions he would replace.

Henderson offers a persuasive attack on Melville's Captain Vere for having the essentially innocent Billy Budd put to death in order to prevent a mutiny. But if it is true that the politically conservative Vere acts unnecessarily, it does not follow that Melville thereby rejects traditional values to align himself with progressivism and revolution. Henderson himself lists Melville's expressions of horror at crowds, revolt, and revolution. By ignoring this evidence of Melville's attitude toward history, Henderson violates both historical method and common sense.

The truth is that literature offers few consolations for political radicalism. Writers who deal with revolution or riot—Hawthorne, Melville, Dickens—recoil from its accompanying brutalities. Yet this does not necessarily place them on the "holist," or conservative, side, for as men of sensitivity they tend to reject any kind of institutional excess. If liberal critics were more interested in politics, it seems to me, they would stand a better chance than either radicals or conservatives of finding support in literature for their position.

But in what way is it politically useful to discover political tendencies in literature? If someone who is of persuasion A can be shown that persuasion B predominates, what then? Will he not simply respond that literature is against him? And in the meantime the critic who has worked up persuasion B will have had a tortuous time of it. Henderson, in his perceptive discussion of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* is confronted by a savage critique of the Communist party. The "Brotherhood" clearly represents the Communist party, Henderson admits, but only "on one level." In order to read the book properly

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we must look "at a deeper level. . . ." With such an evasion we are back at the separation of literature from life that Henderson implicitly opposes. Politics, be it noted, not history, tends to lead the critic astray. Thus, Harry B. Henderson's argument for historical criticism is made all the more persuasive by his occasional abandonment of the historical imagination in American fiction.

The Muscle of History

THE SEVENTH HERO. Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism. *By Philip Rosenberg. Harvard University Press. $10.*

Reviewed by HAROLD KAPLAN

Philip Rosenberg's ambition in this study of Thomas Carlyle is to present nothing less than a theory and justification of radical activism, drawn from Carlyle's earlier writings. Insofar as his theory has shape and cogency, it is a welcome contrast to the anti-intellectual bias of some contemporary political dissenters. Mr. Rosenberg's book sounds as if he got the idea for it when he was a younger man, during the years of the false apocalypse in the sixties, and has used the intervening time for reflection. He wanted a serious case against democratic gradualism and the liberal doctrine, and he has made it. There is brilliance here, and rashness, as well as a candor that lights up the darkest corners of the long battle between liberal democracy and its enemies on the Left. (Carlyle himself was very tough, in fact violent, in his attack upon nineteenth-century liberalism.) The result should concern not only scholars and teachers who deal with Carlyle's reputation but many other people—though I imagine that Rosenberg's book will make Carlyle shine more brightly in many a politically oriented classroom. I have no objection to that; it is an incidental reward that one's faith in literature, and in the study of it, can be supported by contentious, and even tendentious, criticism. Contentious and tendentious *The Seventh Hero* is, but since it is written with drive and powerful focus and since Rosenberg seems to speak for his revisionist generation in now revising that reputed reactionary, Carlyle, it becomes one more contribution to our historic dialogues with classic writers.

Yet although most specialized students of Carlyle are likely to find the book provocative and illuminating, they will not find it convincing. They will no doubt dispute Rosenberg's conclusion that Carlyle was at heart a genuine popular revolutionary—a good teacher of Mao, so to speak—and that he could have been one but for a failure of nerve which was, after all, characteristic of his time and place. Some critics, indeed, have said that he was so much a disciple of Germanic state absolutism that he would have welcomed Hitler; and at the very least, his revolt from nineteenth-century liberalism was that of a feudalist conservative. Rosenberg acknowledges these interpretations and aims to refute them. But one might as easily conclude that the important point is not in the commitment to either Right or Left, but in the particularly emphatic way in which Carlyle exposes the temperament of totalitarianism.

It is necessary, of course, in examining Rosenberg's thesis, to take account of the context in which Carlyle wrote. Yet time has increased the plausibility of that thesis, and history, as it is wont to do, has put its own cast on Carlyle's thought. Surely the religiosity and moral violence of the sixties' New Left (which, recalled by Rosenberg, arouses a rather pained nostalgia) could have found a better mirror in Carlyle than in Marx or Lenin, with all their encumbering weight of economic theory and political strategy. What interests me, more than the validity of his scholarship, is Rosenberg's effort to see his own theory of radical politics in Carlyle's work, though the scholarship is by no means thin or lazy. The link between what a young radical today feels and what Carlyle thought and felt a hundred and fifty years ago can tell us something exceedingly important for the history of modern political ideas and their prompting motives.

The key to this affinity is not intellectual

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theory, or even a social conscience, but the projection of a religious hunger into politics. Carlyle as a young man lost an intelligible universe when he lost his Scotch Calvinist God, and went through the prototypical misery of searching for another source of belief. He found it, like many others of the nineteenth century and particularly those influenced by German thought, in Nature and History. Here Hegel is the starting point—as Rosenberg traces the roots of modern politics—with his most impressive and fatally influential statement in *The Philosophy of History:* "[The course of history] is the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit—that Spirit whose nature is always one and the same, but which unfolds this its one nature in the phenomena of the World's existence."

This unfolding is the unfolding of the Hegelian idea, the perfect intelligible order which is the destination of history, and thus Hegel reconciled action and thought, reason and necessity. But it is important to remember the sequence. The world unfolds *through* history toward the completion of its idea. It is a mistake to apply an idea or a willed ethical choice to the world process unless one is quite certain that the idea is already implicit in action, in existential phenomena. This subordination of values to events leads to very serious consequences in political behavior, and Rosenberg is helpful in detailing some of these consequences as reflected in Carlyle's own political thinking. The first is an obsession with action, in and for itself, since the meaning of the world's existence is found in actual events and not in the floundering of ethical and religious belief which Carlyle described in *Sartor Resartus*. Accordingly Carlyle proceeded to read the lessons of history in the French Revolution, taking the blood and terror with grim zest, as though the more violent the action the more certain the revelation from history. In this view of the primacy of action, as Rosenberg extends it, it seems that the will to act politically is not so much a desire to fulfill one's ethical purposes as to find out what they are.

This explanation is useful when we recall that the priority of action, to the point of excluding thought, was a puzzling phenomenon of student New Left activity in the sixties. Useful also is Rosenberg's emphasis on creative and self-realizing action. He borrows a definition from another student of Hegel, Hannah Arendt, who, in distinguishing "action" from the lower terms "labor" and "work," described it as "activity directed toward other men for the purpose of creating the political realm in which alone full self-realization is possible." Rosenberg pushes the term further than Arendt. "The pure type of such action is revolutionary action," he writes, "revolution being to politics what creativity is to art."

To think of politics as a form of creativity has an obvious danger—that of trying to make others the pawns and instruments of a dream they may or may not share. If activity directed "toward other men" were significantly amended to read "with other men," the result would be closer to the spirit of democratic politics. But the compromising, accommodating, and meliorative nature of democratic politics, a politics neither revolutionary nor artistic, is precisely what is distasteful to the radical temperament, as it certainly was to Carlyle. On the other hand, creative political action is doomed to frustration unless one can control other people as completely as an artist controls his materials.

Behind this view of the moral priority of direct action over consensual politics is a great metaphysical impatience—the hunger for the absolute transferred to history and politics—which is expressed when revolution itself becomes the most significant and fulfilling political activity. In fact, Rosenberg says in his final chapter that "Carlyle's theory of political action is a doctrine of permanent revolution." Here we have the most obscure doctrine of the romantic left. Revolution as commonplace and recurrent as biennial elections? Humdrum terror, casual executions? Perhaps the doctrine is esoteric, almost mystical. Or perhaps Rosenberg really believes, as he suggests, that Mao Tse-tung's periodic purges of the bureaucracy and party structure in China (conducted to enhance his own leadership apparently, since he never purges himself) are examples of how "permanent revolution" works.

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Regardless of such parallels with modern political saints, it is true that a religious ecstasy in politics attracted Carlyle, that son of the Puritans. His close friend and contemporary, John Sterling (whose biography Carlyle wrote) commented on this aspect of Carlyle's thought in his discussion of *Sartor Resartus:*

> What we can find everywhere, with an abundant use of the name of God, is the conception of a formless Infinite, whether in time or space; of a high inscrutable Necessity which it is the chief wisdom and virtue to submit to, which is the mysterious base of all Existence,—shows itself in the laws of every separate being's nature; and for man in the shape of duty.

Remembering that injunction to follow duty, one can fairly ask what it is that demands submission and instructs obedience. History teaches, but it teaches in the way of stomach pangs and the flexing of muscles. Reality is not only prior to judgment, it *is* judgment; "god-like reality" is Carlyle's recurrent phrase. Reality is something that can fight and make bread, and the will to fight and the hunger for bread are the heart of revolution's reality. But revolution is also anger and madness, and Carlyle, still urging obedience to its historic instruction, called the Reign of Terror "the great Nether Deep, of Bedlam, Fanaticism and Popular wrath and madness." At such moments reason cannot be stronger than madness and in fact must submit to it. The side of reason, law, and constitutional formula, represented by the Girondins, was destroyed by the "people," led by the revolutionary Jacobins; as Carlyle says, "it turns out that Respectabilities, though they will vote, will not fight."

This political respect for violence must be taken seriously in the theory of radicalism which Rosenberg provides with an honorable lack of equivocation. Again reading Carlyle selectively, he says that force in politics is always the ultimate arbiter.

> Carlyle never imagines a social or political structure to be anything but a precipitate of force or energy—society being for him, as I have observed repeatedly, the pattern of the ways in which men act and interact with each other. Thus for Carlyle it is only through revolutionary force that a new order can emerge at all.

In this way, force and Hannah Arendt's ethically conceived term, action, have been brought into equivalence, with devastating implications. Carlyle is quoted as saying, "Doubts of any sort cannot be removed except by Action." Rosenberg argues that this holds for our own historic situation. "At a time when doubts have arisen as to what men's rights are, the only way of settling these doubts is to test them in the crucible of political struggle."

This is more than a little like the medieval practice of settling a moral or legal argument through trial of arms. Not only do you prove to others you are right through armed force but, in this view of a divinely revelatory reality, you find out for yourself whether you are right. We are beyond the capacities of moral judgment, Rosenberg has Carlyle say: "This pragmatic test of right is one we can easily recognize as appropriate to revolutionary situations, in which 'Force is not yet distinguished into Bidden and Forbidden.' " And to this Rosenberg adds, "in which, that is, success is identical to justification." Here, then, we are dealing with a Calvinist politics, a revolution of Puritans, who expect to see their sign of divine election in their predestined victory.

On this basis we can build the Carlylean political system as rendered by Rosenberg. The first element is the belief in action, which becomes transcendentally revealing in the climax of revolution. The political leader draws his faith from the historic process and a metaphysical conception of necessity and human fate. He believes in revolutionary force as men once believed in the working of divine justice, and the appeal to force is moral for warriors who serve the Lord of History. For individuals there is enjoined submission, duty, obedience—words that gave Carlyle great spiritual relief. He did not love anarchy or revolution, far from it (and here Rosenberg may deviate most seriously from Carlyle's actual political message); Carlyle loved order and discipline to the extent of supporting state dictatorship.

On this point, Emerson, Carlyle's friend

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and even his disciple in a curiously mismatched relationship, expressed his strongest revulsion. Joseph Slater, who edited the Emerson-Carlyle correspondence, notes that Carlyle was making an implicit response to Emerson's antislavery sentiments in the article entitled "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1849). Slater, who in this respect makes what has been the conventional estimate of Carlyle's political thought, describes the essay as a brutally reactionary statement, chiefly motivated by a hatred of egalitarian liberalism: "A fierce neo-feudalist attack upon the doctrines of racial equality and economic freedom; it advocated a new serfdom, rather than chattel slavery, for all inferior races and classes, a new order of work and obedience; and it was studded with invocations to the State which must have had an ugly sound in Concord."

Whether this is a fair judgment can be left to other readers, and perhaps Rosenberg is justified in ignoring such minor later works by Carlyle. But the question remains whether this essay was not a consistent development from the earlier writings. If the "World-Spirit asked obedience," where was obedience to be directed, and how did the predestined historic order make itself manifest? The answer is in Carlyle's famous leadership principle, his theory of heroes and hero worship, which Rosenberg (to his credit) does not shun but rather gives his final emphasis. He explains that his book is called *The Seventh Hero* because the ultimate hero in Carlyle's system is not any one of the six types he treats in *On Heroes and Hero Worship,* but the hero in oneself, the hero in Everyman. Yet this discussion, which should be the most important, is the least satisfactory part of Rosenberg's book.

As I make it out, the hero in Everyman comes forward in the very nature of mass political action to which he joins himself. "A whole world of heroes" comes into being when "a mass of people [are] prepared and willing to act resolutely on what they believe to be the nature of things." I can't appreciate this much better than I can the doctrine of permanent revolution, but the dangerous implications—call them the possibilities of misunderstanding—are clear enough. The

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hero appears somehow, perhaps like Castro out of the mountains of Cuba. He is a projection of history, he is "shaped and conditioned by the world around him," and he reveals "god-like reality." As Carlyle instructs:

> A man is right and invincible, virtuous and on the road toward sure conquest precisely while he joins himself to the great deep Law of the World, in spite of all superficial laws, temporary appearances, profit-and-loss calculations; he is victorious while he cooperates with that great central Law, not victorious otherwise. . . .

At what expense come such victories and defeats? Were the Germans and the Russians compelled to wait to find out whether their leaders, Hitler and Stalin, were "in touch with the great deep Law of the World"? That question is not unfair to ask when we are given so terrible a taskmaster as history, and when Rosenberg's Carlyle asks us to postpone judgment until every ounce of terror and violence have measured out history's verdict.

But perhaps his most specious argument is that the revolutionary leader is no oppressor so long as his aim is to overthrow established authority, and that submission to him is not enslavement so long as this purpose is shared sincerely and passionately. In Rosenberg's mind, it seems, the only function of the leader is to resist and destroy oppressive institutions. If new bureaucratic and statist institutions arise, then so does another revolutionary leader to oppose them, and this is how we are to understand the creed of permanent revolution. Or perhaps we are to be confronted with another esoteric doctrine of revolutions, the withering away of the state—though Rosenberg does not dwell on this and Carlyle certainly wouldn't have any notion of what it could mean. Perhaps history, which was to be the source of ultimate judgment, is confusing on this point. What Rosenberg finally says, in his last pages, is very lame: "The hero, being human and fallible, may attempt to cash in his charisma, to erect a dictatorial apparatus, but it is precisely at this point that those who, like Carlyle, are committed on principle to nonbureaucratic and nonstatist types of leadership will turn from him as from a traitor."

The bones of such accusers have filled the political graveyards of Europe, and it is lamentable political innocence, in this century, that dares offer us such comfort. It has been said that the theorists of the New Left do not wish to remember history; yet here we have that willed amnesia covering an appeal to absolute moral justification in history. It is like asking history for a muscle but not a brain. John Sterling called Carlyle's treatment of the Reign of Terror "wretchedly perverse," and much as one otherwise admires the vital and full argument Rosenberg sets forth, that phrase comes back to haunt his book on Carlyle.

The Metamorphosis of Virtue

DIDEROT: THE VIRTUE OF A PHILOSOPHER. *By Carol Blum. Viking. $7.95.*

Reviewed by FREDERICK BROWN

In discussing Diderot's novel, *Jacques le fataliste,* Professor Blum observes that its fabric,

> as it weaves itself within the framework of the two sets of relationships, presents an elaborate, dense and frequently patternless surface. The "reader" expects the novelist to arrange events in such a way that they form an intelligible design. Unlike real life, in which experience is confusing and fragmented, the novel should offer incidents which may at first appear unrelated but eventually are shown to be part of a comprehensible totality. The "reader" craves intellectual closure, his *amour-propre* is offended by constant bafflement.

Perhaps the same yearning for intelligible form, for historical transparency, for life-of-a-piece has given rise to our operatic view of literary and philosophical generations. "Enlightenment," "Romanticism," "Realism" form the curriculum of an autonomous *Geist* that moves through time rather as a phonograph needle through a groove, delivering Great Voices from bondage to ordinariness, material woe, inner contradiction, personal

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events. Studying the eighteenth century, for example, we are more often than not invited to picture Diderot, Rousseau, Grimm, d'Holbach, Condillac as so many disembodied shades intoning *recitativos* at an Elysian seminar. Alas, the need to wrest order from chaos may drive scholars to homicide. Is it not paradoxical that *philosophes* who sought to define mankind outside the church have themselves become lay saints, each vouchsafed his day in an academic-liturgical calendar?

Rather than consider Diderot one episode in the biography of an idea, Professor Blum makes an idea—"virtue"—the focal consideration in her biography of Diderot, demonstrating how it metamorphosed, little by little, to accommodate experience, like an organic edifice whose shape at any given moment betrays changes in the mind of its tenant—a cocoon, say, that molds itself to the pupa. What fascinates Professor Blum—indeed it becomes a subject in its own right—is change and, implicitly, stasis. It could be said that she has written the biography of a man who changed, couching it in allusions to a man who did not. Diderot and Rousseau shadow one another in her book, as they did in life. "Rousseau's construction," she writes,

> is like the mist-shrouded castle of a mad king; its details perceived one by one through the swirling fog reveal, in the end, an eccentric coherence. The case of Diderot, Rousseau's most intimate companion and eventually worst enemy, is altogether different. His vision of virtue is more like a living thing, which developed and evolved in time, constantly striving to reconcile the demands of its inner nature with those of the world outside. To comprehend Diderot's attitudes toward the "good" man, or the "good" society, or the "good" work of art, we must see them as momentary compromises in a continuing struggle, rather than as glimpses of an ill-lit pristine whole. . . . The two men were equally determined: one to incorporate the meaning of experience into a world view, the other to deny it.

The change in Diderot's personality turned him outside in. A young ideologue, nonetheless incapable of penetrating himself for having penetrated the conscience of monarchs, he mimicked his virtuous image like an actor playing Hyperion to a satyr. Fame made him its prisoner at an early age. "To be" was, above all, to be fixed, invariable, cast. In his essay on dramatic poetry, he set himself the task of creating an ideal man "according to invariable elements," of *hewing* a self as the sculptor hews a statue:

> I see at first glance that since the ideal man for whom I am searching is a composite as I am, classical sculptors, by determining the proportions which they consider the most beautiful, have in part made my model. . . . Yes. . . . Let us take this statue and animate it.

His project brings to mind Pygmalion sleeping with his statue of Aphrodite. Just as Desire becomes Beauty, occupying aesthetic space, so the desirer, bewildered by impulses a *philosophe* dared not avow, sought refuge from them in an impersonal *objet d'art,* in a marble bedfellow, in a sublime, selfsame image. His concept of virtue would, of course, be the more monolithically probing for bearing no resemblance to his inner face or to his private demeanor. Did he champion the rights and obligations of paternity in *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*? He violated them in life, proving as supine a father as he was derelict a son. Each philosophical discourse celebrated a theatrical epiphany. The ideal man wrought by young Diderot corresponds to the boast made by Rousseau that, even if his skull were made of glass, he would feel no shame walking in public. Like Rousseau's noble solitary, Diderot's noble family was immaculately conceived.

Where Rousseau preserved his glass skull to the last, Diderot smashed his marble effigy, evacuating its space and venturing inward. "Diderot began *L'Entretien de d'Alembert,*" writes Professor Blum,

> by a brutal frontal assault on the conception of the "ideal form of man," proposing that a statue [by Falconet] be smashed to bits, its materials mixed with humus, and consumed by a human being in the form of vegetables grown in the soil thus produced. In this way he resolved the problem of investing lifeless, idealized form with the vital functions in the most radical fashion.

Most an actor when most "hewn of a piece," he won integrity only after recognizing a satyr in Hyperion. His absolute pronun-

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ciamentos his cothurnus, he became truly august only after surmising that a child may, after all, have been father to the man. At thirty, Diderot played father; if, in the following decades, he internalized that role, his daughter Angélique was not the sole beneficiary of his fall from a virtuous stage into time, into history, into his own history—little Denis, like a bastard whose existence Virtue would not countenance, also achieved legitimate status. In effect, it took Diderot a lifetime to nurture himself. Recognizing at last the child who had all along been suing for attention by every prank imaginable, he could thus grasp what continued to elude Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the inwardness that makes people people. Rousseau declared himself born good, and, the Christ child in reverse, willed his sins to society. Diderot exhumed from within himself an urchin who convinced him, though not straightway, that mankind is neither above nor beneath itself, neither limpidly virtuous nor opaquely unregenerate, just human.

Toward the end of his life, he cast a long glance at its beginning. "The more I examine myself," he wrote to an unnamed correspondent,

> the more I am convinced that in our youth there comes a moment which is decisive for our character. A little girl, as pretty as a heart, bit me on the hand. When I complained to her father he pulled up her dress before me, and that little rump stayed in my mind and will stay there as long as I live. Who knows its influence on my morals?

If, in *The Confessions* (which Diderot had heard him read aloud), Rousseau as well put his sexual inclinations to the account of a childhood spanking, history did not teach him, but absolved him. To confess his past was to abolish it, to wipe the slate clean—autobiography being tantamount to suicide, or homicide. "Whoever will examine with his own eyes my nature, my character, my morals, . . . and can believe I am a dishonest man, is himself fit to be hanged," he concludes, hoisting himself, together with man in general, on his confessorial petard.

Diderot's *envoi* to life was more in the nature of a shrug sealing an indifferent bargain: "The assiduous examination of the self serves less to improve us than to teach us that neither we nor anybody else is very good." Indeed, a play to which he devoted some considerable portion of his last years, writing three versions, bears the title *"Est-il bon? Est-il méchant?," "Is he good? Is he bad?"* The title has such a Pirandellian ring, it suggests a Pirandellian dilemma. No doubt experience brought Diderot to the recognition that moral ambiguity is our lot. Was the recognition ever so mature, however, as to extinguish a dream of moral absoluteness? Inside Diderot, who had forsworn the stage, did there lie, asleep, a Rousseau who might have forsworn the world, and begot himself as a "character" impervious to time?

The vital organism does not grow of a piece. Anticipating itself here, lagging behind itself there, it nonetheless coheres. How often will Diderot betray his ideological *parti pris* in his literary creations, as though half-committed to an image of himself already half-outgrown, the not-so-virtuous inner world pressuring the virtuous crust like a prophet pressuring a politician. What emerges from Professor Blum's book is the portrait of a man whose personal experience set mankind a heuristic example and whose thought, especially in the *Encyclopédie,* helped structure the thinking of his age. It seems the more persuasive for its very contradictions. Like every good biographer, Professor Blum travels that thin edge from which one falls, on either side, into the wastes of a deterministic thesis or a mangrove swamp of indiscriminate detail. The form she illuminates would lack relief if not for the darkness she suggests. A good example is her discussion of Diderot's long liaison with Sophie Volland. That he kept faith with a woman more enamored of her own sister than of him, who was alike his mistress and her sister's incestuous partner, suggests the man's complexity. Professor Blum follows the main lines of his face where another might have lost them in the maze:

> She must have seemed to him, above all, a *nice* woman, nice in the sense of being good-humored and of belonging to a more gracious milieu. As Sophie's lover, whatever rewards that position did or did not bring him on a given day, Diderot

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Tribute

THE HOFSTADTER AEGIS: A MEMORIAL. *Edited by Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick. Knopf. $10.*

Reviewed by DAVID HERBERT DONALD

Although Richard Hofstadter was only fifty-four when he died, he had trained nearly a generation of graduate students in the history department of Columbia University. *The Hofstadter Aegis* is a memorial tribute from fourteen of these former members of his doctoral seminar, and it consists of eleven essays, plus a full and useful bibliography of Hofstadter's publications.

The most valuable of the essays is that by the editors, Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, titled "Richard Hofstadter: A Progress." Resisting the temptation to write a short biography of their teacher or to speculate upon the connection between his personal life and political opinions and his historical writings, they have wisely chosen to trace the development of his historical craftsmanship in the years between the publication of *Social Darwinism in American Thought* in 1944 and his death in 1970, when he left unfinished the manuscript of *America at 1750*. In appraising Hofstadter's major books, Elkins and McKitrick are perhaps unduly harsh on *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, with its "oddly flattened" interpretation, and they may be excessively generous in thinking that *The Idea of a Party System* "approached a special kind of perfection." Yet for the most part their judgments are sound and objective. Theirs is the best appraisal yet published of Hofstadter's work, presented with an elegant succinctness worthy of their subject.

The other essays in *The Hofstadter Aegis* also reflect, although in different ways, the influence of the master craftsman. Hofstadter's range was broad, and he directed dissertations in virtually every chronological period of American history. It is appropriate, then, that these memorial essays begin with a thoughtful discussion of James Madison's contributions to *The Federalist,* by Marvin Meyers, and extend through an account of planning under the New Deal, by Otis Graham. Since Hofstadter was never much interested in methodology and certainly never required his students to conform to any particular model, it is only proper that these disciples have experimented with a variety of techniques, from Lawrence Levine's subtle analysis of the latent content of slave folk tales to Dorothy Ross's exploration of James Harvey Robinson's psychological reluctance to make use of the new psychology.

In subject matter these essays reflect, in miniature, Hofstadter's own changing focuses of interest. In a valuable discussion of Thaddeus Stevens and confiscation, Eric Foner, one of Hofstadter's last students, returns to a period about which Hofstadter published his first article. The contributions of Linda K. Kerber on the education of women in the early national period, of Wilson Smith on the antebellum liberal arts college, and of James McLachlan on the educational background of the Mugwumps bear witness to Hofstadter's continuing interest in the history of education, which he helped free from the dead hand of the teachers' colleges. All the essays, from James Banner's speculative discussion of "The Problem of South Carolina" to the dissection of Herbert Hoover's ideology by David Burner and Thomas R. West, are evidence that Hofstadter communicated to his students his enthusiasm for intellectual history and his interest in what the editors call "the entire

Currently Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University, DAVID HERBERT DONALD began his teaching career at Columbia University, where for a decade he was a colleague of Richard Hofstadter.

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landscape of mind in its specific American historical setting."

Although valuable individually, these essays, taken as a whole, leave a reader disappointed and depressed. Except for the fine intellectual portrait of Hofstadter by Elkins and McKitrick, these contributions are inferior in conceptualization, in organization, and in literary excellence to the dissertations the authors prepared under Hofstadter's direction. Unlike Hofstadter, whose every book showed an increasing mastery of the historian's craft, his students do not seem to be growing. Perhaps that judgment is harsh and premature, for some of these essays appear to be extracts from larger works in progress; yet it is hard to see in any of these Hofstadter disciples a true successor. And that, of course, is simply another reason why the American historical profession so badly misses Richard Hofstadter.

Beyond Abstraction

TOWARDS GREEK TRAGEDY: Drama, Myth and Society. *By Brian Vickers. Longman. $18.*

Reviewed by DAVID GRENE

This book is properly called *Towards Greek Tragedy*. It is not one of those inclusive books *on* Greek tragedy which treat of every Greek play (usually in a dull synopsis) with particular introductory chapters on each of the three tragedians. This is an argument, with evidence. What Brian Vickers has done is to look at Greek tragedy in the light of what appear to him as basic concepts. These basic concepts are inclusive inside of his scheme, and he gives us a satisfying and coherent account of Greek tragedy which has nothing in

● DAVID GRENE is professor of classical literature at the University of Chicago, where he is also with the Committee on Social Thought. He is author of, among other books, *Reality and the Heroic Pattern: The Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare and Sophocles* and *Greek Political Theory: The Image of Man in Thucydides and Plato.*

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common with the mechanical construction, crammed with detail, of older works like Max Pohlenz's *Griechische Tragoedie.*

Not that Vickers is short on detail. The book is tremendously long—658 pages—and when one reexamines it one is impressed how little detailed discussion of anything relevant—particular plays, their place in their author's work, themes, and dramatic emphasis—is omitted. Where there is so much loving care, good taste, imagination, and scholarship it is perhaps ungracious to say that the book is too long. But it is. When Vickers gets to subjects such as the various assumptions about myth, all the way from Fraser and his followers to the merits and defects of modern structuralism, he loses his sense of the argument he is conducting and the chapter becomes too much of a survey of wrong and right views of myth. On the other hand, his section on the relation of Greek society to myth is masterly. He cuts corners, but with confidence and grace. But the book as a whole, even the brilliant analyses of the *Oresteia, Oedipus Rex,* and the four Electra plays, would benefit greatly by cutting. Vickers has a number of often new and always fresh and illuminating points to make. He frequently makes them in a few lively and provocative sentences. But one hardly has time to take these in before he is hurrying ahead, drowning his reader in acknowledgments of one partial supporter, criticism of an opponent, or quotations from another authority who has summed up another aspect of his own initial statement. It is not that Vickers is repetitious; he is not. But the sequence and arrangement of his thoughts are less forceful than they should be; there is too much of secondary comment mixed in with primary sources of evidence. In spite of the voluminous footnotes, not enough of the matter proper to them has gone into those footnotes. And its appearance on the page dilutes and weakens the fascinating quality of his argument.

The book is so good that to make these objections may seem ungenerous. One is impelled, however, to object because Vickers's contributions are of a kind very ill-suited to the excess of particulars and scholarly references. More than any critic of Greek tragedy that I have read, Vickers cares passionately, simply, and directly about his subject, deeply appreciates it as a kind of theater, and has a proper dislike of anything and anyone who stands between him and it. He will have none of the numerous critics, among them John Jones, who are constantly assuring us that Greek tragedy is so remote that we will do best with it by reminding ourselves that it is nearly impossible to understand. How right Vickers is! He strikes straight at the heart of our own relation to the plays by saying of translation, with all its faults, "The language of Greek tragedy is the representation of human action and a competent version will reproduce the substance of that action (and even the metaphors which are used to evaluate it) sufficiently for us to be able to engage it as a human experience." He pays a most generous tribute to those of us whose translations he has used in his book. He clearly knows about modern performances of Greek plays and appreciates what they try to do. He makes simple but very telling comments on the wrong way to see a Greek tragedy, as when a critic isolates a line or two and finds in them the "key" to the play. Vickers stresses that a play is a continuing and evolving situation and that its "meaning" changes in a vital way through the participation of its audience. One would think this an obvious truth; but Vickers is right that if it were borne in mind, a mass of irrelevant criticism might be avoided. If his section on myth is somewhat too long and detailed, he does reach a clear and valuable conclusion—that Greek myths embody truths of Greek society and history. There is no reason, for instance, to imagine that the Homeric poems give us a version distorted by folklore, imagination, et cetera, of what must have been a primitive period of "true" myth.

If I have some reservations about Vickers's absolute championship of the individual and "character" as the heart of the Greek tragedy, his is certainly a far saner and more moving and truthful way to see the plays than to handle them in reference to such cloudy abstractions as dike and nemesis, of which, in some way, they are supposed to be representations. This is particularly true when it is so easy to demonstrate, as Vickers does

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with the help of some recent scholars, that such abstractions cannot be proved to have been the beliefs of the time, nor to have had anything like the import that their latter day academic critics have given them. One of Vickers's bits of apocalyptic simplicity that blows away masses of nonsense is his statement that one needs more than a couple of lines in a play or poem to prove the existence of a whole pattern of theology and philosophy in an age.

As it is difficult even to indicate the scope of this book, I must be content to comment on some especially interesting arguments.

Vickers follows T. H. J. Lloyd-Jones in asserting the continuity and structure in the treatment of myths from Homer to Apollodorus—a period of about a thousand years. This view is at variance with those of such scholars as E. R. Dodds who find decisive shifts in moral feeling during the fifth century, and interpret the myths, as then rendered, in the same spirit. Vickers declares "the same basic moral response to violations of the social code will be seen at one end of the period as the other, and the same concern with manifest, not latent meanings" —for Vickers will have no truck with allegory in Greek myths.

This is very provocative. For comparative purposes can we imagine "the same basic moral response to violations of the social code" in Europe, or any part of it, in the period between the Norman Conquest of England and the present day? I would think it extremely doubtful. Certainly I should doubt whether Christianity and the Christian myth, which ostensibly could maintain the continuity, have done so, in the terms that Vickers suggests of the Greek myths.

Yet Vickers may be right—or more right than wrong anyway—for the character of these Greek myths, as they were rendered to the generations, may be the explanation. As early in the fifth century as Herodotus, there is no clear distinction between literary truth and religious truth. Herodotus flatly states that Homer and Hesiod created the theogony and assigned to the gods their names and their functions; this at once distances these poetic "myths" from the sacred story and historical uniqueness that characterized

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Christianity. One can believe in basic common values, or at least attitudes, toward a problem in Shakespeare's *Othello;* and in Verdi the story of Othello is not part of the Gospels. Granted that Homer is sometimes used by later Greeks as an authority on history, his most important interest for them lies elsewhere. He is the source—one of the main sources—of the everchanging but also permanent truth that inheres in great imaginative literature. Vickers says, ". . . since the Olympian gods are individualized, polytheistic, anthropomorphic they cannot be interpreted as forming a collective, ethical or metaphysical system." Yes, perhaps, if you interpret "system" strictly. But there is in Homer a very strong and consistent presentation of a tragic universe in which gods and men play interacting roles, both equally "real" and both equally "imagined" in a story. A picture of a tragic universe with both men and gods in it does, I think, take in "basic moral response to violations of the social code." It may be that the flexibility of artistic creation preserves this more effectively through the thousand years of its existence than the insistence on sacred truth.

In his discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics* Vickers follows Gerald Else's book and accepts Else's theory that *hamartia* means no less and no more than a mistake about the identity of someone related to you by blood. He supports this with Aristotle's emphasis on *agnoia* (ignorance) and *anagnorisis* (recognition), and by pointing to Aristotle's restriction of his "best examples" of tragedy to the families of Thyestes and Oedipus, where the violence and pollution is conspicuously due to ignorance of the enormity of the sin because of ignorance of relationship to the victim. It is a bit doubtful if either Else or Vickers is entirely right here; but it is not at all doubtful that the right road with Aristotle's criticism is that which Vickers follows: to interpret Aristotle's theory by the examples he gives us, and to avoid implications for the rest of the history of tragedy. Vickers and Else certainly make a very credible argument that Aristotle meant *hamartia* as they claim he did. Vickers certainly illuminates point after point in particular plays using Aristotle strictly, without pestering us with extensions of Aristotle's words to forms of tragedy where they can have a tortured relevance at best. It is possible to read Vickers's account of the *Poetics* and to be grateful to both Aristotle and Vickers, instead of fighting down the irritation and boredom that the mention of the *Poetics* nowadays is all too calculated to arouse.

Vickers says that *Towards Greek Tragedy* is the first volume, to which there will be a successor, covering, in the main, tragedy since the Greeks. If the second volume is anywhere near as comprehensive and searching as the first, he will have done an immense job. I look forward to the next installment.

Bakunin Revivified

BAKUNIN: THE FATHER OF ANARCHISM. *By Anthony Masters. Saturday Review Press/E. P. Dutton. $9.95.*

THE ANARCHIST COLLECTIVES. *Edited by Sam Dolgoff. Introductory Essay by Murray Bookchin. Free Life Editions. $10.*

Reviewed by GEORGE WOODCOCK

Unlike his great rival Marx, Bakunin has received less than his due of attention from scholars writing in English. This is not because of any deep-seated repugnance toward his basic doctrines, for there is a strong libertarian strain in British and American radicalism that has provided some of the classic anarchist writers and writings, from *Political Justice* and *Civil Disobedience* down to *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* and *Education Through Art*. But the style of Anglo-American anarchism had been profoundly different from that of the European continental anarchism of which Bakunin was the most dramatic personification. The writers in Britain and America who have contributed most to anarchist thought have been either reclusive thinkers like Godwin and Thoreau or

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bohemian artists like Shelley, Wilde, and Paul Goodman. They have been inclined to see their goal achieved less by conspiracy and insurrection in the Bakuninist manner than by education or art or even sex, like Godwin and Herbert Read and Alex Comfort respectively.

This has meant that, even among English-speaking anarchists in the past, Kropotkin always seemed a more congenial figure than Bakunin. He was a scholar and a voluminous and readable writer, whereas Bakunin wrote hastily, with deep but sporadic insights, and, as he once admitted to Alexander Herzen, without much sense of literary architecture. Kropotkin came to live among the English and won them by his personality, so that Bernard Shaw, in a note he once wrote to me, expressed a typical reaction: "Personally Kropotkin was amiable to the point of saintliness, and with his red full beard and lovable expression might have been a shepherd from the Delectable Mountains." No one could think of Bakunin in such Bunyanesque terms, and he lived among the British too briefly and too secretly for his kind of expansive geniality to compete with Kropotkin's sweetness-and-light.

Indeed, before Anthony Masters's new biography, *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism,* appeared, there existed in English only one full-length life of Bakunin, that by E. H. Carr, which appeared in 1937. Good in its way, as a piece of elegant writing, Carr's *Bakunin* was very much a period piece, marked by the anti-Romanticism of the decade in which it was written, and presenting the same kind of ironic view as is expressed in the very title of Carr's other important book, *The Romantic Exiles,* in which Bakunin appears again as a member of the Herzen circle. Carr never took anarchism—Bakuninist or any other brand—seriously, and he tended to stress Bakunin's bohemian habits and his more naïve conspiratorial practices, so that the portrait finally emerging is less that of a dedicated revolutionary and seminal intuitive thinker than of a representative of that type so beloved of Anglo-Saxons in the past (and perhaps even in the present), the eccentric aristocrat.

SHELLEY'S ANNUS MIRABILIS

The Maturing of an Epic Vision

by Stuart Curran

From the autumn of 1818 to early 1820 Percy Bysshe Shelley produced a series of works which, for diversity and brilliance, have seldom been matched by any other writer. It was, in truth, an *annus mirabilis.* Mr. Curran discusses these works, which include *Prometheus Bound* and *The Cenci.* He also studies the mythological sources from all over the world on which Shelley must have drawn, and relates this background to the poems.

April, 264 pp. (approx.), illus. $14.50 (tent.)

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The eccentric aristocrat was indeed part of Bakunin's makeup; and, as Roderick Kedward remarks in his foreword to *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism,* Anthony Masters in his new study "does not underestimate or deny the egocentric bravura of Bakunin's life" or the extent to which Bakunin acted as "a kind of revolutionary prima donna." On the other hand, Masters does make a case for Bakunin to be regarded seriously as a political activist and a political thinker moved by insight as well as impulse, whose chaotic writings contain the elements of a viable program of social transformation. There is indeed a major inaccuracy in the title of his book that reflects a weakness in his argument. He calls Bakunin "the Father of Anarchism," whereas Bakunin himself said, "Proudhon is the master of us all." Masters fails to give due importance to the extent of Proudhon's theoretical influence on his successor (after all Proudhon, not Bakunin, was the first man willingly to call himself an *anarchist*), or the extent to which, when marshaling his forces in the First International, Bakunin made use of an anti-authoritarian movement that had already developed under Proudhon's unobtrusive leadership in the Latin countries and especially in France and Spain.

Nevertheless, Masters's narrative of Bakunin's life is fluent and always interesting, projecting a vigorous sense of personality and yet at the same time placing the hero (I use the word deliberately) in his correct relation to the future if not to the past. By this I mean that recent events have taught us—as Masters indicates—that in many ways Bakunin's insights were sharper than Marx's. He foresaw with extraordinary accuracy the authoritarian shapes Marxism would take, as it has done on every occasion when it was applied in practice. In some respects even the Marxists, without acknowledging it, found themselves obliged to abandon Marx and accept Bakuninist contentions. When Lenin reshaped the Bolshevik party, he transformed it into a conspiratorial brotherhood not unlike those Bakunin had plotted. When Mao shook off the influence of his Russian advisers and turned his followers into guerrilla organizers and teachers moving among the peasantry "like fish swimming in water," he was tacitly admitting the justice of Bakunin's view that the great revolutionary potential of the future would be found not in the narrow and shrinking world of the proletariat, the industrial workers, but among the world's great masses of peasants and unskilled workers, victims of colonial as well as metropolitan oppression.

In showing how Bakunin foresaw not only the negative but also the positive elements in modern movements among the dispossessed, Masters reflects the considerable resurgence of Bakunin's reputation that took place during the 1960s, when anarchism underwent one of its periodic resurrections as part of the new radical movement. At least two volumes containing selected translations from Bakunin, compiled respectively by Arthur Lehning and Sam Dolgoff, have appeared in recent years. These, with *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism,* give us the material for a reassessment of the anarchist leader as a political critic and inventor, as an active revolutionary whose influence on working-class movements, in the Latin world at least, was considerable, and as a person at once heroic and pathetic and, in his own unsaintly way, as lovable as Kropotkin. His followers wept beside the grave of the exiled Bakunin in Berne more for a lost friend than for a lost leader.

In general, Anthony Masters provides a fresh point of view rather than many new facts. His references are entirely to published sources, and if he has used archival material, there is little evidence of the fact. Nevertheless, he has made intelligent play of his material, and, especially in view of the scarcity and limitations of Carr's *Bakunin,* he has performed a service by presenting Bakunin anew and in a spirit of sympathetic criticism. Here and there, however, one encounters the jarring touch of gratuitous popularization. Is it necessary or helpful, for example, always to refer to Bakunin as "Michael"?

One of the dramatic episodes in the spread of Bakunin's influence during his life provides a key scene in both *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism* and in the other book I am reviewing, *The Anarchist Collectives.* In 1869,

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wishing to get ahead of his Marxist rivals in the International, Bakunin sent an Italian engineer, Giuseppe Fanelli, as his emissary to Spain. With the cavalier disregard of practical details that characterized his methods, Bakunin had picked a man who spoke no Spanish, but Fanelli talked with such passion, and rolled his dark eyes so eloquently, that he created a pentecostal atmosphere in which his hearers were converted—so that for seventy years, until the end of the Spanish Civil War, Spain was the most enduring anarchist stronghold. The great anarchosyndicalist union, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, stiffened by a typically Bakuninist conspiratorial core called the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), numbered at its height some two million members and was the most powerful radical group in Catalonia, Andalusia, and Aragon, among peasants and industrial workers alike.

The remark is sometimes made that, although history has proved Bakunin partially right, validating his negative prophesies about Marxism, his positive ideas have worked only when incorporated in authoritarian programs by men like Lenin and Mao. *The Anarchist Collectives* does a great deal to disprove such contentions; for Sam Dolgoff, in the documentary material that he has gathered (supported by Murray Bookchin in an excellent historical introduction), presents the record of the anarchist collectivizations of land, factories, and services during the Spanish Civil War. These collectivizations were great in extent; there were about seventeen hundred agricultural collectives embracing some three million peasants, as well as hundreds of thousands of workers in collective factories and transport undertakings in Catalonia. The evidence Dolgoff presents from eyewitness reports (and it is largely supported outside the book by the evidence of more critical observers like Franz Borkenau) leaves no doubt that the collectives, which operated on fairly strict Bakuninist lines, were for the most part successful in creating viable libertarian communes and in improving standards of production as well as social relations. Few of them collapsed from internal weaknesses; they were mostly destroyed by the advancing Francoists and by Communist generals like the repulsive Enrique Lister who were carrying on their own civil war of exterminating rivals behind the Republican lines.

The Anarchist Collectives is not lacking in defects, for most of its writers use a stiff syndicalist jargon and few of them have the kind of descriptive capacity that makes one *feel* what it was like to live in some of history's few prototypes of an anarchist world. The book might also have been made more complete and more credible to nonanarchists by including interviews with actual survivors of the collectives who are living as exiles in France and Mexico, and also by quoting more extensively the views of fair if critical outsiders, like Borkenau and Orwell, who saw this movement in action. In its present form, it has too partisan a feeling—it speaks to the converted—and the Spanish experiences of Bakunin's followers, which have been neglected by historians, deserve a broader treatment.

Shadowy Dramas

DRAMAS, FIELDS, AND METAPHORS. Symbolic Action in Human Society. *By Victor Turner. Cornell. $16.50.*

Reviewed by WILTON S. DILLON

One of the last great general anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber of Berkeley, once lamented the impact of the social sciences on anthropology as a limiting form of *scientism,* a tendency studied by Robert K. Merton to find "truth" mainly through measurement, and other emulations of the natural or physical sciences. Although not opposing new tools or modes of analysis, Kroeber correctly warned against the im-

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poverishment of an eclectic "science of man" cut off from the older habit of perceiving anthropology as history with strong links to literature, the arts, and other "subjective" phenomena. The late Melville Herskovits also pleaded for anthropologists to study humanities. Of course, Kroeber wrote before some historians embraced computers, and he set off clouds of disdain for the fragment of a letter, an anecdote, or an observed gesture that contributed nothing to generalizations or "laws." His lamentation came before the advent of Victor Turner. What Turner writes should interest not only anthropologists, but psychiatrists, political scientists, historians, theologians, sociologists of religion, and students of literature and theater.

True, in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* Turner writes of "liminality," "communitas," "anti-structure," "arena," "root paradigm," "multi-vocality," "social drama," "polarization of ritual symbols," and "the processual view of society." While such concepts will never serve one well in working out a crossword puzzle, and may even reinforce a justified disdain for the jargon of the social sciences, as an anthropologist whose goal is finding language that can be shared across the disciplines and by "the general public," I find that the hard work involved in reading Turner is amply rewarded for those interested in perceiving new or lost dimensions of contemporary civilization and its forerunners. "Theories," as Turner rightly declares, become relevant "only if and when they illuminate social reality." Turner's conceptualizations, linked as they are to observable or historical events, are vital diagnostic tools for figuring out what ails industrial or technocratic civilization. In these seven fertile essays, written mainly for anthropologists, Turner conveys ways to understand the shadowy, indeed nearly invisible, dramas unfolding before our eyes.

Compare, for example, contemporary Americans with the pilgrims en route to Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome, the shrine of the Dark Virgin of Guadalupe, and Pandharpur or those living in the cosmologically rich culture of the Dogon of Mali, and one gets a handle on Turner's concepts, liminality and communitas (both of which are more extensively spelled out in his earlier work, *The Ritual Process*). In contrast to the pilgrims in such ritual-ridden cultures, Americans appear impoverished in the stark ceremonial formlessness marking their movements from birth to death, or perhaps it is better to say "unmarking," as Turner says "anti-structure"? Our life cycles, with the exception of members of certain ethnic or religious groups, are lived out iconoclastically. We are always at some uncelebrated threshold (*limen,* the Latin for threshold, becomes "liminal phase" in Arnold van Gennep's classic *Rites of Passage,* and "liminality" in Turner). Turner wrote, in *The Ritual Process,* "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. . . . Liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to the eclipse of the sun and the moon." In America, we are poor in designing cultural punctuation marks for changes in place, state, social position, and age. Turner makes us think about new definitions, beyond environmental issues, of "the quality of life." The problem is to escape social limbo, or at least to enjoy such a rootless state by finding bonds with other lonely sufferers of Durkheim's anomie.

"Communitas" is Turner's Latin preference for "community," which sounds too much like living in the same place. With the help of Daisetz Suzuki's *The Japanese Mind* and Florian Znaniecki's *The Method of Sociology,* Turner defines communitas as social anti-structure, a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals—a temporary communion or network of equals brought together with Buberian I-Thou feelings outside the peripheries of everyday life. Situational friendships on a plane to Mecca, such as those experienced by Malcolm X and described in his autobiography? Football fans on a chartered train going to the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia? One may find his own examples closer to home than Turner's field work on the liminality and communitas he observed in installation rites for a chief

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among the Ndembu people of Zambia. Once one has worked out his own referential meaning he can then throw away the language, as Karl Menninger once told his students of psychiatry to do after introducing them to the id, ego, and supergo. The advice was to avoid making entities out of concepts. Turner peels back the layers of the natural history of his own conceptual evolution, nobly acknowledging his intellectual debts (among them to Robert Nisbet, I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, W. H. Auden, and William Blake) and challenging others to name theirs in the effort to discover the observer's bases of selecting and ordering "facts." Such, without statistics, would be a truer objectivity.

Alongside the sometimes thorny language of his conceptualizations, Turner reveals a gift for aphorism. A few examples will have to suffice. "People will die for values that oppose their interests and promote interests that oppose their values"; "game theory is an excellent tool for interpreting some kinds of gentlemanly competition, but it is impotent before those social changes that shake the very premises and foundations of the social order"; "human social life is the process and product of time, which becomes its measure—an ancient idea that had resonances in the very different works of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Henri Bergson."

All such propositions need to be read against the backdrop of Turner's views on the gaps, lapses, and new directions in anthropology—namely, the quickened interest in the neglected role of symbols in social and cultural processes. His essays appear in a Cornell Press series, of which he is the general editor, on symbol, myth, and ritual—phenomena already illustrated by other volumes studying Peyote cults, play in Bermuda, and art and religion in aboriginal Australia. Now we have Turner's wide-ranging treatment of symbolic action in ancient and medieval society as well as in such modern revolutionary settings as Mexico, China, India, Africa, and Europe (including conflict resolution in Icelandic sagas and the confrontations between Henry II and Thomas à Becket). That Canterbury social drama, like finding connections between episodes in Hidalgo's insurrection of 1810, represents an anthropologist's special reading of history as Lewinian "fields" (abstract cultural domains where paradigms are formulated, established, and come into conflict) and "arenas" (the concrete setting in which paradigms become transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilized and fought over by people with different things in their minds).

Although Turner gently admonishes that "genuine creative imagination, inventiveness, or inspiration goes beyond spatial imagination or any skill at forming metaphors," I confess my own dependence on visual aids for understanding conceptual archetypes and metaphors. Watching the symbolic acting out of important components of post-Aztec Mexican history on the site of the ancient Aztec capital's main square and Great Temple in Mexico City, for example, I began to understand Turner's notion of "multivocality," a capacity to resonate among many meanings at once, like a chord in music. Symbols can be manipulated for education in civitas. One has only to remember what medieval European artisans and artists did with communicating the Christian story in stained glass and sculpture, and what liturgists added to these processes of communication with procession and pageantry. Can we not abstract our own history, myths, and legends through forms other than the jigs and songs of Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams in the musical *1776*?

If contemporary application of Turner's concepts is wanted, then political anthropologists can scarcely do better than to classify the recent Watergate debacle by Turner's identification of four phases of public action in a social drama: (1) the *breach* of "norm-governed social relations"; (2) the mounting *crisis* after the breach; (3) *redressive action* to limit the spread of crisis and restore peace among contending groups; and (4) *reintegration* and ritual reconciliation.

Such gems are among the rewards of reading Victor Turner, whose work fulfills Alfred Kroeber's hope that complex, literate cultures should never become out of bounds for anthropologists.

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The Reader Replies

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—EDITOR

I spent many years in admiration of Mr. Lionel Trilling, as I explored in the field of literature. Now I find him coming up with an exciting theory for educators (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Winter 1974/75, "The Uncertain Future of the Humanistic Ideal"), and, in fact, outdoing most of them.

In the early 1960s, by which time I had already spent over twenty-five years teaching children and youth, from nursery through college years, I began to recognize a new kind of student, and one who appeared to be very impressive. It took me a while to see that many of them were functioning behind a verbal smoke screen; that their sophisticated talent at human analysis, and their "advanced public attitudes," sprang from an overabiding self-concern, rather than a genuine commitment to the welfare of others.

In teaching the educationally and economically disadvantaged student I was disappointed for just the reason that Mr. Trilling describes. For the thirst for knowledge was seldom keen, focused as it was on the "process of accreditation with an economic-social end in view. . . ." Mr. Trilling implies that the causes are many and complex.

In any case, from whatever background, it was the rare student, either from liberal arts or education, who hungered for knowledge; nor did more than a few show any desire or drive to emulate the great figures that were discussed. Quite the contrary: they expressed toward them indifference, or competitiveness, or contempt.

Mr. Trilling's reference to the "excellent handbook of linguistic usage" that tells the reader not to refer to anyone as a *pupil* who is over the age of twelve (Mr. Trilling was uncertain of the exact age), is followed by his astute analysis: "To apply the word to a person who has passed the canonical age can only be considered derogatory in that it implies being taught or being required to learn, and thus denies the autonomy made manifest in the word *student*." The statement goes on to say that probably this feeling, on the part of many Americans of the arbitrary denial of autonomy in being taught or required to learn, "goes far toward explaining the state of primary and secondary education in our country." To this excellent hypothesis I would like to add several points that I think are not unrelated.

Mr. Trilling is right in realizing that the effectual process of education begins before the age of eighteen. Indeed, I would put it in the first grade that the child attends. But the scene up and down is not encouraging. I suspect that, to a large extent, the character I have portrayed here is the result of a culture that has shifted the child from one "who may be seen but not heard," to an orbit that centers completely around him, making him of primary importance, while adults take a back seat. In the case of the disadvantaged, the child is encouraged to believe that his color and/or poverty makes him important. Sadly enough, children who learn to focus on being important are not likely to feel worthwhile. Under such circumstances autonomy is a very shaky matter and easily threatened.

I have already lived long enough to see a number of lower and high school teachers, and some in college, come out of those ranks. Among other shortcomings, their own vulnerable sense of autonomy leads them to get overinvolved with their students in ways other than teaching inspiringly and well the subject matter their students so desperately need.

There is no question in my mind that the humanistic tradition will continue to fade unless teaching is improved. Toward this goal, as has already been endlessly discussed, there has got to be better substantive education, better recruitment, better selection of teachers, and better in-service training; further, in all areas of the country, and on all levels, there should be a kind of halfway house for the disadvantaged learner, who, after successfully coping with his school subjects, could

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move on with his education in the appropriate spheres. Always, of course, one of the concerns should be to help the student feel worthwhile (*not* "important"), a process that evolves, and is greatly aided, as he copes with responsibilities and tasks, at all age levels, that are suitable and worthwhile. Such a process helps build in the flexibility and receptivity that are part of a sound autonomy, and one that is more likely to embrace the humanistic ideal.

If, like Mr. Trilling, more professors were alert to the degree to which their own "commitment to the promise of the humanities" depends on good education *before* the college years, there might be some effective joint effort, growing out of common concerns, that could be helpful to that ideal.

Judith Eibe Kranes
Professor of Education
Director, New York University's
Para-Educator Center for Young Adults
New York, New York

* * *

I have recently finished reading the Spring 1975 issue of The American Scholar and, as usual, enjoyed it immensely.

One of the papers that I found especially interesting, on several levels, was Professor Bouwsma's "Models of the Educated Man."

It is interesting to me because, first of all, it's just simply very elegant and erudite; it's beautifully done. Second, I believe the topic to be one of profound importance; *how* to educate *whom* by what *means* towards what *ends* are questions of ultimate significance now and for the future as they have in times past.

Professor Bouwsma's paper was also interesting to me because in it he discusses education for the warrior, for the scribe, for the citizen, for the private man and presumes that he has made a statement about education that points the way to the future.

Without so much as a wink or nod, he has completely excluded any reference at all to the education of women. Obviously the editors of The American Scholar are not oblivious to the education of women because you neatly tucked into the same edition Ellen Moers's "Mme de Staël and the Woman of Genius." You even allotted about equal space.

Millicent Rutherford
Los Altos Hills, California

* * *

I read with genuine interest and mixed feelings, "The New American Scholarship Boy" by Richard Rodriguez in the Winter issue of the Scholar. I was quite enthralled to see Mr. Rodriguez make his experiences known—experiences I personally have had welling inside me (though superficially) for the past three years. Yet it typifies my sad state of muddled emotions.

The past few years have seen me becoming divorced from my community—the "street culture"—which I had been a part of for all my seventeen years, and which I still hold a deep respect and love for. But I am also a budding intellectual on the threshold of a college career. College seems to be the only sane choice—but it promotes feelings of guilt and regret that I had

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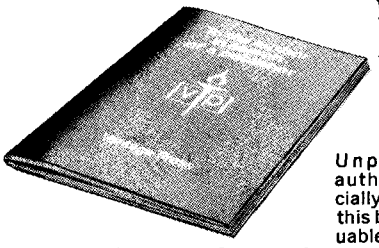

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previously hoped would disappear as my imminent academic career envelopes me. Mr. Rodriguez has proven to me that such feelings will probably continue through life, and thus the community I am leaving will reject me if and when I return with the knowledge of the academy.

It should be pointed out as a closing remark that I am neither Chicano nor Black. I am white, middle-class, half-Jewish; the community I will leave is also white and middle-class, but their actions, speech, dress, et cetera, are parts of a culture in its own right.

Bob Richman
Paterson, New Jersey

* * *

Marshall Smelser's observation at the end of "The Babe on Balance" in the Spring issue ("[Babe Ruth] is our Hercules, our Samson, Beowulf, Siegfried. No other person outside public life so stirred our imaginations and captured our affections") has been made repeatedly in fiction by writers as different in method as Ring Lardner, Bernard Malamud, Robert Coover, and Philip Roth, among others. Indeed, the Babe Ruth legend is a dominant strain in the sizable body of baseball fiction published this century, a body of literature that comprises the primary material for my doctoral dissertation, "From Ritual to Fiction: Baseball in American Literature." As Professor Smelser suggests, the ur-Hercules, ur-Samson, Beowulf, and Siegfried historical heroes no doubt arose out of their respective milieus in ways not unlike Ruth's rise to legend in America. And as John Alexander Graham (again, among others) demonstrates through his novel, *Babe Ruth Caught in a Snowstorm,* the Babe Ruth myth reflects a quintessential truth about American culture.

Cordelia Candelaria
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

* * *

In saying that I think René Dubos in his column in the Spring issue was being too despairing and not enough of an optimist, I hasten to add that I must agree with all that he says about us as individuals. Many of us would be much better off doing more for ourselves and relying less on the gasoline and electrical servants.

I am, however, always dubious of the use of averages, for instance the energy consumed per person in the discussion of national energy requirements or even of personal requirements. Thus a member of the jet set could well consume one thousand times the energy per year as a poor farmer in Appalachia. I know Professor Dubos is right about the heavy consumer and on an individual basis he may well be right for the nation as a whole.

When it comes to national requirements, though, I cannot believe that we can afford to reduce our energy consumption. Perhaps we have reached the point of no return in the application of energy to agriculture, as the Professor suggests, but we do have enormous social goals facing us in the future, all of which require energy. Such items as the rebuilding of our cities, the increase in the facilities for handling wastes and pollutants, increase in medical and health care facilities, increase in our educational and research institutions, provision for mass transportation are a few that come to mind to say nothing of our continuing interest in space. Are we to ignore these?

As a scientist who enjoys reading The American Scholar may I suggest that perhaps we say too little in our magazine about the good sides of science and technology. Professor Dubos himself knows firsthand not only the many social triumphs but also the sheer happiness and joy that can come to individual creators in these fields.

Calvin S. Fuller
Vero Beach, Florida

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